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LECTURES,
EXPOSITORY AND PRACTICAL,
ON
SELECT PORTIONS
OF
SCRIPTURE.

BY THE
REV. ANDREW THOMSON, A. M.
MINISTER OF ST GEORGE'S, EDINBURGH.

VOL. II.



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EDINBURGH:

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REV. ANDREW THOMSON, A.M.

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LECTURE XIV.

ACTS iv. 1—12.

1. *And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them,—2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.—3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now even-tide.—4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.—5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,—6. And Annas the high-priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high-priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.—7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?—8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,—9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;—10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.—11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.—12. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*

THE apostles Peter and John had wrought a miracle in proof of their divine commission, as messengers of God and of Christ.

This miracle produced a mighty effect on the minds of the people. "They were filled with wonder and amazement." Peter embraced the favourable opportunity of addressing them on the subject of Christianity, and delivered to them a suitable, affectionate, and powerful discourse. From the topics which it discussed, the spirit which pervaded it, and the impression it was calculated to make, it could not fail to give deep offence to certain classes of the Jews. Accordingly, we are told, that measures were immediately adopted to prevent the apostles from continuing their evangelical labours.

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them; being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day; for it was now even-tide."

Priests are naturally jealous of innovations in sacred things. Nor is this jealousy,

when accompanied with a proper spirit, and kept within proper bounds, to be either lamented or condemned. Nay, from their belief in the religion which they profess, and the official situation which they hold in the church, it is expected, that they shall anxiously guard the people against those temptations to error, whether in principle or in practice, to which they are exposed. An indifference to this duty would shew, that their own hearts are not sufficiently affected with what they inculcate upon others; that the doctrines, which they have nominally embraced, are of little or no importance in their esteem; that the spiritual welfare of those whom they have been appointed to instruct does not engage their attention; that they are wholly unqualified for the station which they occupy in the world.

But then if, amidst the zeal which it becomes them to feel and to exhibit, they do not keep their minds open to conviction; if prejudice, or resentment, leads them to oppose truth; if the claims of secular inte-

rest, or power, or reputation, make them reject tenets, which are not only sound in themselves, and salutary in their consequences, but which come to them enforced by the sanctions of divine authority;—their anxiety for maintaining the purity of religion is converted into blind and reprehensible bigotry; and that conduct which, in different circumstances, would have merited applause, as equally pious and humane, becomes now rebellion against the will of heaven, and hostility to the improvement of men. In this case, they can scarcely be censured with too much severity; for, influenced by bad passions and by base motives, they are enemies to God, and to true religion, and to the souls of their brethren.

Such were the priests of whom we read in the passage before us. The evidence for Christianity was such as to satisfy every candid person of its divine origin, and, consequently, to leave them without excuse in rejecting it. Had they set themselves ingenuously to inquire into its truth; had

they thoroughly examined the pretensions of Christ, and attended to the manner in which he had supported them; had they shewn a due anxiety to know the truth, and been disposed to admit whatever was proved to them; and yet had they failed to arrive at the just conclusion of such researches, we should have pitied rather than condemned them. But, in fact, they never for a moment pursued this course. From the very beginning of his career, they conceived prejudices against Jesus which were never afterwards removed. Because he re-proved them for their hypocrisy and their sins, they formed purposes of revenge, which they laboured to carry into effect. His superior knowledge of the Scriptures, and his miraculous gifts, had lowered their reputation and influence among the people; the success of his Gospel directly tended to destroy their authority, and to deprive them of their professional gains; and, therefore, though the argument for his divine mission was distinctly before their eyes, and though they could not deny it, they yet refused to

admit the inference, and to act upon it. Every thing was dearer to them than truth; and, on that account, they went so far as to crucify the Prince of Life. That hostility, which they had manifested to him, they extended to his disciples after his departure. His departure had been attended with augmented proofs of his Messiahship; every day produced an additional testimony to the Gospel which he had introduced; but all this seemed only to increase their animosity, and to harden them in unbelief. And when they found the apostles "teaching the people" that Jesus was the Saviour and the Christ, forgetting or disregarding the grand principles on which it became them, as the ministers of religion, to act, they came upon them with all the violence of ungovernable rage, and endeavoured to overwhelm them with the weight of their authority.

They did not, however, come alone. They did not come to reason with the apostles. Their object was neither to enlighten, nor to be enlightened. This was too rational,

and too much in the spirit of genuine religion, for men whose worldly passions had conquered all their better feelings. They came to vilify, to dogmatise, to wield the sceptre of ecclesiastical power, and to crush at once the victims who had offended them. Accordingly they brought along with them "the captain of the temple," as a fit coadjutor, and a willing instrument of their oppression.—There were twenty-four watches in the temple, of which the priests kept three, and the Levites twenty-one. Over each of these watches, which consisted of many individuals, there was one who acted in the capacity of chief; and over them all there was one appointed, who, by way of eminence, was stiled the *Captain*, or chief Ruler of the Temple. He was a servant, or officer, under the authority of the Priests; and his duty seems to have consisted in apprehending those who offended in the temple, and bringing them before the High Priests and Sanhedrim for punishment.—The Priests, by bringing the Captain of the Temple along with them on this occasion,

answered two purposes, both of which they had much at heart. In the *first* place, they got the Apostles in their power in such a form, as that they could proceed against them for conviction and punishment; and, in the *second* place, by taking them into custody, they would injure their respectability in the estimation of many of the people, and thus bring the doctrine which they taught proportionally into disrepute.

But there was another party that joined them in opposing and harassing the Apostles, namely, the Sadducees. There was a great contrariety between the tenets of the Priests and those of the Sadducees; such a contrariety as should have prevented them, one would think, from co-operating in almost any case with much confidence or cordiality. The Priests were Pharisees; who not only stickled for what they found in all the Scriptures according to their own interpretation of it, but added to that the traditions of the Elders; who were superstitious, or hypocritical, in the highest degree; and who avowedly hated all those

who differed from them in the particular views which they entertained. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were the infidels or freethinkers of those days. They admitted only a certain part of Scripture to possess any divine authority. They explained it in such a way as to exclude from their creed all belief in a separate and a future state of existence. What they had of religious principle took but a feeble hold of their mind; and, having annihilated the prospect of retribution in an eternal world, they usually led a careless, dissipated, abandoned life. Dissimilar, however, and contrary, and hostile as these two classes of men were to one another in their general sentiments and conduct, they united against the doctrine and the disciples of Christ. The Priests were grieved and irritated at Peter and John because they "taught the people," taking upon themselves an office in which the Priests claimed a peculiar property, and inculcating a faith which they deemed in direct opposition to theirs; and the Sadducees were provoked at them, not

merely because they taught Christianity in general, but chiefly because they insisted on the doctrine of the resurrection,—thus condemning their characteristic tenet, and by this means disturbing them in their dreams of guilty pleasure. In several points, and these too of essential moment, the Priests and Sadducees differed even as to their notions of that Gospel which the Apostles preached; but in the feeling of enmity against them they were as one. This feeling was a bond of union; and, accordingly, we see them going hand in hand to bring destruction upon the objects of their vengeance.

What slaves of passion must those priests have been, to associate in any purpose respecting the great interests of religion, so readily and so warmly with those who might be said to be the enemies of all true religion! How infatuated and how impious does their conduct appear, when it is considered, that they entered into this unholy alliance with those who evidently joined them, not because the doctrine of Christ's

resurrection proved the truth of his mission, but principally because it contradicted and belied their unscriptural and unbelieving notions on the subject of men's resurrection to a state of rewards and punishments! And how emphatically does it teach us, to temper our zeal with sober thought and discriminating prudence, so that we may not sacrifice our own personal consistency, the dignity of our Christian character, and the substantial interests of the cause we are promoting, at the shrine of headstrong passion, of inflexible bigotry, or sordid ambition!

But while we speak thus of the priests, we have a remark to add respecting the Sadducees, or the infidels. Infidels are continually declaiming against bigotry and persecution; and we join them in reprobating the temper to which these attach, as most unreasonable in itself, and as the fruitful source of evil to the world. But when they impute it to the abettors of Christianity exclusively; when they boast of their own liberality, and talk as if the

principles of toleration were understood and practised by them alone, we must remind them, that this is not consistent with fact. It would not be very difficult to shew, that their peculiar views have a direct and necessary tendency to cherish that very spirit to which they profess so much hostility. But when we go from speculation to experience, it is not to be denied, that, whenever they have it in their power, they are fully as much disposed to persecute believers, as believers have ever been to persecute them. The Jewish infidels joined with the priests in endeavouring to silence, by mere force, the Apostles of Jesus, who were zealously, but peaceably, addressing their countrymen on a most interesting subject, declaring to them what they had actually witnessed, and reasoning with them on the truth of what they taught. This is not a singular or insulated case. The history of religion presents us with many instances of a similar kind. In the present day, and among ourselves, the fact is frequently exemplified. General feeling and established

law prevent infidels, as well as Christians, from employing authority or force to bear down their opponents. But are infidels liberal and tolerant for all that? Quite the contrary. If we have just as little religion as brings us near themselves, and gives them the hope of having us soon among their number, then they speak of us in the language of eulogium and encouragement. But if we believe our Bible, and bear the character which it prescribes, and are zealous for what we deem important and eternal truth, what treatment do we usually receive? I answer, *Persecution*. We are subjected to their ridicule and abuse. We lose, in their eyes, every good quality of heart and of understanding. We are either so weak as to be despised, or so hypocritical as to be hated, or so fanatical as to be laughed at without reserve. Any indulgence we receive from them comes in the shape of pity,—of pity mixed with scorn, and covered with affectation, and carrying a sting in it just as bitter and intolerable to

many minds, as the coarser implements of fire and fetters.

Priests, however, and infidels, may unite as much as they please in opposing the progress of the truth ; their efforts will be unavailing. The truth is under the immediate and special protection of the Almighty. Those who fight against it are fighting against him ; and the result of the contest cannot therefore be doubtful. Adversities may occasionally seem to attend the march of Christianity : her friends and advocates may be exposed to dangers that threaten to overwhelm them : her enemies may exult in the partial success of their opposition, and derive encouragement from this to anticipate her speedy and final extinction from the earth. But all this while God, the omnipotent and unchangeable God, is watching over her interests. He is pledged for her continued preservation, her gradual prosperity, and her ultimate triumph. The purposes and the promises of his grace must sooner or later be fulfilled. In carrying them forward, the wisdom of those

who are labouring to counteract them will be converted by him into folly, and their strength into weakness. And in overruling their best laid schemes for promoting the very object which they were intended to thwart, he will "make the wrath of man to praise him, while the remainder of wrath he will restrain."

No doubt the priests and Sadducees flattered themselves, that the doctrine of the Apostles was to be severely checked by the imprisonment of their persons; that, by this strong and decisive measure, the people would be rescued from their supposed delusions; and that it would only require the exercise of a little more power, and the infliction of a few more penalties, to give its death-blow to the Gospel of Jesus. Yet there was passing before their eyes, at this very time, a scene which might well have staggered their confidence, and made them pause in their career of oppression. Multitudes were deeply affected by the miracle and the preaching of Peter and John; a divine blessing accom-

panied the labours of these holy men ; and, under its influence, the doctrine which they delivered was received by a vast proportion of the people in faith and love, and openly professed by them, in spite of the sufferings which awaited them on account of their conversion. “Howbeit, many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand.” It may be said, that in this there was something miraculous. Be it so : as a ground of encouragement and of hope, it is the same as if every thing had happened according to the ordinary course of Providence. He who guarded and promoted the Gospel at its commencement, by supernatural interpositions of his power, is not likely to forsake or to neglect such a work in any subsequent stage of its progress. Those secret energies by which he silently conducts the movements of the universe, are just as efficient when he wills it, as the more striking demonstrations by which he manifested his government in the first ages of the church. And we may rest

assured, for he has promised it, that “against that church the gates of hell shall never prevail.” It rests upon the rock of ages. It is defended by the arm of everlasting strength. And against all the combined hostility of men and devils, it will stand secure for ever.

“And it came to pass, on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.” This assembly was convened for the purpose of calling the Apostles to account, and of putting a stop to their labours as ministers of Christ. In such a measure, however, we can easily perceive a tendency to frustrate the very object for which it was adopted. The priests and Sadducees, no doubt, plumed themselves on their wisdom and their vigour; but excessive unhallowed zeal is blind, and is often, as in this case, directed to the destruction of its own cause. In the *first* place, the treatment which the

Apostles received, would naturally confirm their faith in Jesus, and inspire them with additional ardour and fortitude in his work; for it was an exact fulfilment of the predictions that he uttered respecting their future condition. "They shall lay their hands on you," said he, "and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons; being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake." In the *second* place, it drew the attention of the people to them, and awakened a more general sympathy in their behalf. The great Jewish council was called together on their account: its importance and solemnity were increased by the presence of eminent leaders, who did not usually attend it: the subject of which it was to judge involved a doctrine of a most interesting nature, and a miracle performed in support of it: the persons to be judged by it were those who taught the doctrine and wrought the miracle: and so momentous was the one, and so indisputable was the other, that the more they were considered and

canvassed, the more certain were they of securing proselytes to the religion of Christ. And it may be added, in the *third* place, that the public trial which they were necessitated by their adversaries to undergo, gave them the most favourable opportunities of asserting and proclaiming the great truths of the Gospel; it was the occasion of their experiencing the fidelity of their departed Master, in fulfilling the promise which he had given them, of assistance in the hour of difficulty and danger; and it furnished them with the means of exhibiting to the people that firmness and constancy in the midst of persecution, which could not fail to convey a strong impression of the truth of their testimony, and the rectitude of their character.

“ And when they had set them in the midst”—in the midst of the assembly, the place where criminals used to stand during their trial—“ they asked, By what power or by what name have ye done this ?” They acknowledged the reality of the miraculous cure which had been wrought on the lame

man ;—this indeed was too publicly known and too recently performed to be called in question or denied. And had they possessed a right understanding of the subject before them, and been free from prejudice against Jesus of Nazareth, their enquiry needed not to have gone any farther; it would not at least have assumed that tone, or taken that direction, which they gave to it. But they had no desire to arrive at a just conclusion. They were resolved to suppress, if possible, the cause of Christ. And they put a question to his disciples, which, if it did not extort from them, through the influence of terror, a confession discreditable to their Master, might at any rate procure an explicit one of their attachment to him, and thus afford them a plausible pretext for the sentence of condemnation which they were disposed or determined to pronounce.

Peter did not for a moment shrink from the task, which a conviction of truth and duty now imposed upon him. He gave a bold, an explicit, and faithful answer. He

spoke and acted, indeed, under immediate direction from heaven. “He was filled with the Holy Ghost.” His divine Master had given him the promise of adequate assistance, in all such critical circumstances as those in which he was now placed. He had said to him, “When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” This was the promise. Peter relied upon it; and he experienced, in a most remarkable manner, the faithfulness of that Master whom he served.

In seasons of difficulty and peril, we have no assurance of such extraordinary aid, and therefore no reason to expect it. But our duty is as plain before us, as Peter’s was before him: we must discharge it with the same fortitude; and we must be animated by the same encouragement. It is our duty to confess Christ before men—to confess him as our Saviour and our Lord. This

confession may expose us to ridicule and persecution. Still, however, our obligations to make it are obvious and commanding. And why should we be afraid of the consequences? Formidable as they may appear to our feeble and timid souls, what are they to us in reality, if we have that faith in Christ which we ought to have? He has promised to make his "grace sufficient for us, and to perfect his strength in our weakness;" and he has also assured us, that "if we confess him before men, he will at last confess us before his Father who is in heaven."

The reply which Peter makes to the question put to him by the Sanhedrim, is very similar to what he had previously declared to the multitude. He states distinctly, that the miracle referred to was wrought by the power and in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; annexing to this statement, in order to give it all its meaning and all its effect, the two important events on which he had formerly insisted,—the crucifixion of Christ, and his

resurrection from the dead. “Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel; if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead; even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.” Here the Apostle speaks as faithfully to the conscience of the rulers, before whom he now stood as a criminal, as he did to that of the multitude who gathered round about him, under the impressions of admiration and astonishment at his miracle. He accuses them broadly of having crucified Jesus unjustly; for he adds, that God had raised him from the dead, which never could have happened, had he only suffered, as they alleged, for his blasphemy and his crimes. And he enforces the charge of murder against them by declaring, that he whom they had put to death was not only risen again, but exercising supreme dominion, inasmuch as he

had conferred upon his disciples the gift of miracles.

He farther illustrates and presses home their guilt, by reminding them of a prophecy which David uttered respecting the Messiah, the treatment he should receive from the Jewish rulers, and his final triumph over all their malice. "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." By your sacred office, you should have been builders in the church of God. In discharging the functions of that office, you should have recognised Jesus Christ as the stone most essential to your work, and joyfully received him into the place which he was entitled to hold. But, instead of acting towards him as "wise master builders," you have most contemptuously rejected him as not only useless, but injurious. Nevertheless, he is rescued from the ignominy to which you had foolishly and wickedly doomed him ; and he is become "the head of the corner,"—to which the whole building is indebted for the union, the beau-

ty, and the strength by which it is distinguished.

Having thus reproached them severely, and endeavoured to awaken in them contrition and alarm for their rejection of Christ, by an apposite and striking reference to their own prophetical Scriptures, the Apostle concludes with a solemn declaration, full of instruction alike to them and to all who hear the Gospel. “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” He intimated to the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, that highly as they thought of their own attainments, and despicable as their opinion was of Jesus whom they had crucified, it was not by any excellence in themselves—it was only by faith in him as the Messiah, that they could expect the spiritual deliverance which they needed. In this way, he at once humbled that pride by which they were so strongly actuated; condemned their conduct towards Christ, whom they still persecuted; represented

him in the full importance of his mission, and in the full glory of his character; and compassionately directed the Jews to the only source from which they could derive the blessings of redemption.

Let us, my friends, take this home to ourselves, as a most momentous and most satisfying truth. We are in a state of guilt and danger, equally miserable and helpless; and whether we look to our own resources, or to those which may be found in any created being, we perceive that they are wholly incompetent to the accomplishment of our salvation. But Jesus Christ, “approved of God,” and ordained by him to the sacred office, has “come into the world to save sinners.” He died for our offences; he rose again for our justification; he is “able and mighty to save us to the very uttermost;” and “through him are preached to us the forgiveness of sins,” and our acceptance unto eternal life. What then remains for us to do, but to accept of him with gratitude and joy? Let us believe in him, that thus we may be “justi-

fied from all things from which we could not have been justified by the law of Moses," and far less by the law of nature. Let us rely upon him, and submit to him, in every part of his redeeming character; and let us do so, under the solemn assurance, that if we reject him, or if we only receive him so far as it may suit our own private views, we must perish in our sins; for "there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

LECTURE XV.

ACTS iv. 13—22.

13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.—14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.—15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,—16. Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.—17. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.—18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.—19. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.—20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.—21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.—22. For the man was above forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

THE priests and Sadducees had apprehended the Apostles, and brought them before the Jewish Sanhedrim. This council questioned them as to the name and authority

by which they had restored the lame man. And to this enquiry they gave a bold and explicit answer—ascribing the miracle to the power of Jesus of Nazareth, whom the rulers of Israel had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead—holding out that person as one whose unjust treatment and subsequent exaltation were clearly foretold by the prophets—and declaring, that however much they despised him, and however eagerly they might oppose his Gospel, yet it was through him alone that spiritual and eternal salvation could be obtained by any of the children of men.

“Now,” says the historian, “when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

The Sanhedrim had good reason to admire the *boldness* of the Apostles. They were standing before those who had authority to command, and power to punish; who had persecuted and put to death the

Master whose doctrine they taught, and whose example they followed; and who manifested the strongest disposition to subject them to the same cruel and ignominious fate. Their courage, therefore, consisted not merely in overcoming that awe which we naturally feel in the presence of those who are sitting as judges on our fortune or our life, but in declaring, without reserve and without hesitation, the very truths which were most likely to provoke their resentments, and to hasten a sentence of condemnation. No wonder that the Sanhedrim marvelled at such a display of fortitude and valour. It was something which they had not been accustomed to meet with in the criminals brought to their bar: it was contrary to what might have been anticipated from the ordinary principles and feelings of human nature: it was a spirit for which they could not easily account, and which they were not prepared to encounter.

But their astonishment was increased by considering what sort of men the Apostles

were, in point of intelligence and situation. “And perceived,” says our version, “that they were unlearned and ignorant men.” This is an unhappy translation—not at all suited to the circumstances of the case, though warranted by the original language. The clause should have been rendered, *illiterate men, and men of private station*. This is the literal meaning of the Greek words, and evidently the view that is suggested by the context. The Apostles were by no means destitute of sound judgment, and by no means unacquainted with the subject under discussion. In these respects, they were at least as well qualified as those by whom they were examined and tried. But they had not profound erudition and practised eloquence, so as to be qualified, with “the words of man’s wisdom,” to argue the priests and doctors of the law out of their prejudices and hostility against the Christian faith. Nor had they that exalted rank in society by which they might have procured respect to the statements for which they could not reason, and been embolden-

ed to speak with confidence to the rulers and other official characters, that constituted the great council of the nation. Their learning, according to the technical meaning of the word, was so limited and contemptible, and their condition in life so very humble, that, even though they had been conscious of innocence, little else was to be expected from them but timidity and submission ;—certainly not that dignified deportment, and firm defiance of danger and suffering, which they exhibited on this interesting occasion. The Sanhedrim, therefore, marvelled that persons so poorly gifted, and so mean in worldly estate, should, in the circumstances in which the Apostles now stood, display such uncommon steadfastness and intrepidity.

There was still another thing which struck the minds of the council. “ And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” They knew the Apostles, recognised their persons, and remembered to have seen them with Jesus, as his disciples and constant attendants. This,

taken in connection with the declarations they had made, placed their conduct in a more respectable and commanding light than might have been at first imagined. They were not speaking of what they had heard by vague and uncertain report. They were not narrating events which were the mere fancies of their own imaginations. They were not drawing conclusions for which they had no warrant, from their own experience or observation. They were not promulgating doctrines that were either incoherent in themselves, or unconnected with that series of wonderful works which they had witnessed in the life of Jesus. They were intimately acquainted with Jesus—with his doctrine, his character, his miracles—with all that he had taught, all that he had done, and all that had befallen him. It was but fair, therefore, to consider them as speaking and acting under the impression of what they had actually seen, and certainly known: as offering a testimony to facts of whose reality they were fully competent to judge and to give evidence; and as stating doctrines which, in their con-

viction, had a close and necessary relation to the same divine authority which was so conspicuously exercised during the life, at the death, and in the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

We must recollect also what is stated in the 14th verse. "And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it." Here was the very person on whom the Apostles had performed the miraculous cure. The Sanhedrim had only to examine *him*, and as many as they pleased of the multitude, in whose presence the cure was wrought, to be convinced of the fact. But, indeed, it was unnecessary for them to institute this formal enquiry. They themselves seem to have been satisfied, that such investigation would only establish the thing more completely, and publish it more widely. And it is not improbable, that some of their number had been passing into the temple when the transaction took place, and must consequently have been aware, that any attempts to controvert or disprove it would be utterly fruitless. It was therefore

dangerous, as well as unnecessary, to adopt the usual modes and forms of judicial procedure. It would not only have failed in effecting the object which the Sanhedrim had in view, but would have at once more openly exposed the oppressive course they were determined to pursue, and more fully justified that unshaken fidelity to their Master's cause, which the Apostles were equally determined to maintain.

The particulars now stated should have been efficient in rescuing the Apostles instantaneously out of the hands of the Jewish rulers. They were qualified to be witnesses for Jesus; they gave their testimony with a freedom which defied the utmost efforts of malice, and the last punishments of the law. They had no superiority of intellectual attainments, nor of outward station, to inspire them with confidence, or to secure for them the forbearance of their judges; their whole deportment bespoke a mind supported by the consciousness of integrity and truth, resolutely attached to the principles and the path of duty, and ani-

mated with hopes that lifted them above the terrors of death; and, to crown the whole, they appeared before the mightiest of the land, having the sanction of heaven impressed on the testimony they gave, and the message they delivered, so visibly and so distinctly, as to challenge the closest scrutiny, and set at defiance all the sophistry of their enemies. We know what the effect of all this ought to have been,—immediate acquittal, and unconditional deliverance. But we see, also, what it actually was. The Apostles were not immediately or unconditionally set free; attempts were made to restrain and to silence them, which nothing that had transpired could justify or excuse. At the same time we observe in the Sanhedrim the power of conscience struggling with those unhallowed passions which actuated them. The compromise into which they condescended to enter, demonstrates the sacrifice which they were constrained to make to the imperious demand of truth; and, if we were anxious to adduce an evidence more striking than

another of a victory over the foes of Christianity, and of their acknowledgment of their own defeat, we should select the proceedings of the Jewish Sanhedrim as recorded in the verses we are now to read.

“ But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, what shall we do to these men? for that, indeed, a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no farther among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

It is perfectly clear, that the Jewish rulers had a fixed resolution to bear down the religion of Christ, whatever sacrifices of principle, of feeling, and of consistency, the attempt might cost them. That religion shocked their prejudices, diminished their authority, exposed their hypocrisy, cut

up the sources of their temporal emolument, and frustrated all the hopes which they had foolishly, but sanguinely, entertained of the kingdom of the promised Messiah. For these reasons, he, by whom it was published to the world, became the object of their inveterate enmity and relentless vengeance. They never thought of ascertaining the truth of his mission; into that they were careless of inquiring. They never gave any candid attention to the proofs of it which he daily exhibited to their view; that might have been attended with inconvenience. Even when their gain-saying was confuted, and the demonstration of incontrovertible facts forced upon their minds, they either refused to draw the inferences which reason dictated, or, in spite of these inferences, persevered in their opposition. What was it to them that miracles were wrought, that prophecies were fulfilled, that doctrines bearing the stamp of divinity were taught? What was all this to them, determined, as they were, not to repent, not to believe, not to obey the

Gospel? It was in pursuance of this determination, that they crucified Jesus, at the expence of piety, and justice, and humanity; and it was in pursuance of the same determination, that they now directed their hostile efforts against those whom Jesus had commissioned to preach his Gospel to the world. The evidence of Christ's Messiahship remained in all its original force; nay, every hour brought to it new and multiplied accessions of strength. The Apostles had wrought a miracle in the name of Jesus, the reality of which the Jewish rulers themselves were under the necessity of acknowledging; and the behaviour of these men in circumstances the most critical and trying, had excited in them an astonishment that bordered on admiration, and extorted an unwilling though visible tribute of respect. Yet it was all in vain. It was the sullen and obstinate purpose of the Sanhedrim, that, if by any means they could prevent its progress, the Gospel "should spread no farther among the people." They, therefore, agreed to lay

a peremptory injunction on the Apostles, that they should not teach any more in the name of Jesus, and annexed a threatening of displeasure and punishment, to intimidate them into a slavish submission.

In reflecting on this conduct of the Jewish Sanhedrim, there are two remarks which naturally suggest themselves to our consideration. In the *first* place, we find here a reluctant but explicit testimony to the truth of our religion given by its bitterest enemies. They acknowledge that a miracle was wrought in its support by the men who preached it. This, indeed, was no more than had been often—we should rather say generally—done with regard to the miracles performed by Christ. The Jews did not presume to deny that Christ wrought miracles. They granted the fact, because it was impossible for them to call it in question. It is of no consequence that this acknowledgment was inefficient and fruitless as to their conversion. The argument to us is equally good as it would have been had they all become Christians.

Though *they* reasoned illogically on the subject, *we* are under no obligation to adopt their false conclusion; and though *they* acted inconsistently, that is no ground for *our* following them in the path of contradiction and absurdity. It is enough for us that they testify the fact; in this case, the testimony of an enemy is stronger than that of a friend. We take the fact as they have given it; and, because miracles were wrought in support of Christianity, we infer, under the direction of common understanding, that Christianity is divine,—that it is justly entitled to our cordial belief, and our practical submission.

In the *second* place, we observe in the procedure of the Sanhedrim what we cannot fail to condemn, and what it becomes us carefully to avoid. How worthless and contemptible does their conduct appear towards the Apostles! The truth is demonstrated to them; yet they shut their eyes and their hearts against its influence. Innocence is established by the accused; yet they lay it under restraints which should

only have been imposed on guilt. The way of duty was plain before them ; yet, instead of following it, they turned aside into the crooked bye-paths of interest, resentment, and pride. They had not courage, indeed, at this time, to go to the extremity of injustice, and to destroy those whom they were averse to save ; but far less had they courage to resist the impulses of lawless passion, and surrender every other claim to that of truth and equity. They neither rose to the true dignity of virtue, nor yet were they prepared to advance and boldly take their station on the fore-ground of vice. They displayed all that deliberate malignity of purpose, with all that affected moderation of conduct, which were natural to men who knew what was right, but were resolved to do what was wrong, and whose iniquitous designs were only restrained by base timidity, or by worldly prudence. And all this was transacted, when clothed in the robes of office, and seated on the chair of authority, and professing to be zealous for the God of truth and justice. The sacred

learning which they possessed, the judicial power with which they were invested, and the public influence which, by these and other means, they had acquired, they calmly prostituted to the purposes of bigotry, malice, and ambition. While we reprobate their conduct, let us beware of falling into the same condemnation. Let us keep our minds open to conviction, however much our worldly prospects, or our favourite opinions may be affected by it. Let us guard against those temptations in which we may be placed to oppose the progress of truth, by whomsoever it may be discovered or propagated; and, instead of employing the power with which we may be entrusted, or the influence of which we may be possessed, in oppressing and persecuting those who hold a different creed from ours, and whom we cannot subdue by argument, let us practise that forbearance, that charity, that kindness, by which alone the triumph of Christianity can be honourably and permanently secured.

Sickened at the unreasonableness, the

selfishness, and the tyranny of these “masters in Israel,” it is refreshing to contemplate the character of the Apostles. It affords a noble and gratifying contrast. In it we not only behold excellence which we must admire, but an example which should at once direct and animate us. “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, whether it be right, in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”—“We are conscious of no want of respect for you as our judges. We feel no disposition to disobey your lawful commands. We are inclined to submit to your authority in every point, when the exercise of that authority does not exceed its legitimate bounds. But the same principle which would dictate such sentiments and demeanour in all ordinary cases, prescribes an opposite line of conduct on the present occasion. The authority of God, for which you yourselves profess to cherish the profoundest reverence, is paramount and supreme;

and if that points out to us a different path from the one which you have pointed out, we appeal to yourselves, if we are not bound, by the most powerful and solemn obligations, to give it an immediate and decided preference. Now we cannot conscientiously remain silent. We cannot refrain from attesting the miracles which Christ has performed before our eyes, and from asserting those doctrines which we know to be divine. We cannot withhold that message which God has commissioned us to deliver to mankind, and which is so essential to their salvation. For persevering in the course which we have hitherto pursued, we have every motive that can be derived from a sense of duty to God,—from emotions of gratitude to the Redeemer,—from sentiments of compassion to our fellow men,—and from a regard to our own immortal interest. We are aware of incurring your displeasure. We have heard your threatenings; and we have no reason to doubt of their being carried into effect. But “none of these things move us.” We

know the utmost that you can do against us; and we consider it as nothing when weighed in the balance of a good conscience. Our duty is obvious. Our purpose is unalterably fixed. We are the servants and messengers of God. His commands will we obey; in his grace we confide; and from him we look for our final reward."

Such is the import of the Apostles' answer to the Jewish Sanhedrim. It places them in the most respectable light in which moral agents can be presented to our view. It impresses us with a high idea of that religious principle by which they were actuated; and, through the medium of their disinterested and unconquerable integrity, we are carried directly to recognise the truth of that Gospel, of which they were thus the faithful and the fearless preachers.

While we admire, let us be careful to imitate them. In all circumstances, and at all times, let it be our first concern to make ourselves acquainted with the will of God; and let it be our next to do it. This conduct may be opposed by the pride or the corruption

of our own hearts, and by the maxims and practices of the world around us. It may run counter to the advices of our friends, and to the commands of our superiors. It may expose us to ridicule and reproach, to suffering and to death. Be it so ;—it is still incumbent on us to “obey God rather than man.” This is our first, our great, our leading duty, without which there is no such thing as either religion or virtue—without which life would be full of guilt, and eternity full of punishment. Let us perform it with firmness and intrepidity. The faithful discharge of it will be attended with the purest satisfaction, for we shall have an approving mind. Grace will be imparted, to uphold and to comfort us in the time of need. Even in this world we shall experience the truth of Scripture, that “they who love the divine law have great peace,” and that “nothing shall offend” or disturb them. Bringing all our actions to the test of this enquiry, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do,” we shall avoid those errors and those sins, which those who take a dif-

ferent guide are perpetually committing, and by which they are perpetually distressed. And when this life of trial and of sorrow is over, all that we have done shall be rewarded, all that we have suffered shall be compensated, and all that we hoped for shall be realised, in the approving sentence of our God and Judge,—“ Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.”

The free and manly tone in which the Apostles spoke could not fail to provoke their judges more than ever. Yet their judges did not proceed to extremities against them. They only repeated their threatenings, and then dismissed them. “ So when they had farther threatened them, they let them go.” The historian assigns the motive by which they were induced to restrain their anger, and to treat the Apostles with a lenity so unsuitable to their supposed demerits. “ Finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people : for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years

old on whom this miracle of healing was shewed." The miracle had accomplished the cure of a person whose recovery, by mere human means, was utterly hopeless. It relieved a poor creature from want and wretchedness. It thus displayed, in a striking manner, the divine attributes of power and mercy. And for the manifestation of these which had now been given them, the people united in ascribing praise and glory to God, to whom they looked as the author of such wonderful works. At the same time, they regarded, with affection and respect, the Apostles, who had been the agents in performing the miraculous cure; and attached the idea of something so sacred to their character and persons, that they were ready to resent any injury that their rulers might inflict upon them.—Let us imitate these people so far, as to recognise the hand of God in the deliverances which are experienced, and the blessings which are received, by ourselves or by our fellow men. And while we give him the glory, as the bountiful source of all good, let us not for-

get to cultivate gratitude and respect for those who are the willing instruments of his kind providence, either in removing evil or in imparting good.

We see that the Sanhedrim were desirous to punish the Apostles. But in all that they had said, and in all that they had done, they could find nothing that would have justified such treatment, in the estimation of the people. And, on this account alone, they abstained from it. But how unworthy was such a motive, to influence the conduct of men so situated as the members of that great council! How unworthy is it to influence the conduct of men in any situation! It is giving to mortal men that submission which is due only to the immortal God. It is fearing those who can "only kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do;" and not fearing him who, "after he has killed the body, can cast both soul and body into hell." It is pleasing creatures, whose approbation can go with us no farther than the grave; and not pleasing that great Being, whose

favour is essential to our happiness throughout eternity. True, indeed, it was fortunate that, on this occasion, a deference to the sentiments of the multitude restrained the Jewish rulers from perpetrating an act of injustice, perhaps of murder. But let it be remembered, that it did not alter the state of their hearts; it did not change their feelings and their purposes of revenge. It only prevented the outward expression of them for the time, and left that on which God principally looks, in all its original turpitude and guilt. And if the current of popular feeling had happened to flow in a different direction, they would have given free scope to their accursed passions, and without hesitation embrued their hands in the blood of innocence. Without being indifferent to the sentiments of those, in whose judgment, and integrity, and friendship, we can safely confide, let us beware of being the slaves of public opinion. Let us recollect that we have an infinitely better and safer rule of conduct in our Bible, which is the word of that God by whom we

are at present governed, and to whom we are accountable at last. Our Bible will never mislead us. It will at all times conduct us in the path of duty. If the character which it prescribes and forms, does not procure for us the respect and esteem of men, their respect and esteem are not worth possessing. We have remaining, what is far better, the pleasing and elevating testimony of our own conscience. The great and eternal Jehovah is our friend. And when the censures and applauses of sinful mortals are alike buried in oblivion, our witness is in heaven, our record is on high, our glory lasts for ever.

LECTURE XVI.

ACTS iv. 23—37.

23. *And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.—24. And when they heard that, they lift up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is ;—25. Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?—26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Christ.—27. For of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together,—28. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.—29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,—30. By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.—31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.—32. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common.—33. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.—34. Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold*

them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,—35. And laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.—36. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,—37. Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

WHEN Peter and John were dismissed by the Sanhedrim, they proceeded to act in pursuance of the resolution which they had formed and expressed. Had they regarded the threatenings by which the council attempted to intimidate them; had they been awed by the authority which forbade them to preach the Gospel, or frightened by those punishments with which their adherence to that cause was to be visited,—we should have found them retiring into the stillness and security of private life, and carefully avoiding every appearance of repeating that conduct which had given such mortal offence, and was attended with such imminent danger. But the commandment of fallible and sinful men was of no force or obligation in their esteem, when they had distinctly before them the commandment of

Him who ruleth over all. The fear of God had taken possession of their minds, and expelled every other fear that the weakness of humanity could inspire. They were ready to encounter every peril, and to endure every affliction, that they might faithfully do their duty—that they might maintain a good conscience, and execute the high office committed to their trust. Accordingly, they went directly to those with whom they had been accustomed to associate, and who were employed in the same arduous and obnoxious work of proclaiming the Messiahship and the salvation of Jesus. To them, they reported the treatment they had received, the injunctions that were laid upon them, the persecution with which they were menaced, and the reply which they had made to the council. And as soon as they had finished the report, the whole company of disciples that were present, felt themselves deeply affected by what had taken place; and, yielding to the natural impulse of a mind that is strongly imbued with sentiments of piety,

or being impressed, perhaps, with an extraordinary communication of the divine Spirit, they all united in presenting a devotional address to God, suitable to the nature of the cause in which they were engaged, and to the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed.

In seasons of distress, or of difficulty, or of temptation, if we are true Christians, we will have recourse to God. To him we are directed to apply in all such cases. From him alone, indeed, can we expect to receive what our situation requires. And we are encouraged to spread out our wants and our desires before him, by the assurance that he is not more able than he is willing, to bestow "every good and perfect gift" on those who "ask it of him in prayer, believing." Such, too, has been the practice of all those who have gone before us to heaven and to glory. They have recognised it as a duty. They have felt it to be an honour, a privilege, a delight. They have derived from it solid comfort, and substantial improvement. And it comes

to us recommended by all that can engage and secure our imitation.

Let not the precepts of Scripture, nor the influence of Apostolic example, be lost upon us. While we habitually rely upon God, and habitually attend to the exercises of devotion, let our dependence be more especially cherished, and our applications at a throne of grace more particularly earnest and importunate, when the dark cloud of adversity is quenching the light of heaven in our souls, or casting its shadows on the glory and prospects of the church. Far from joining in that ungodly ridicule which is too often poured on those who are known to be given to private or social prayer, let us approve of their attention to such holy exercises, and endeavour to copy into our own character that piety by which theirs is distinguished. Let us never be ashamed to "acknowledge the Lord in all our ways." But under the influence of that fear and love, that faith and hope which Christianity inspires, let us make known all our wants and all our requests to our heavenly

Father, and supplicate from him those supplies of strength, and counsel, and consolation, which are necessary to carry us forward in our journey through the world. A miraculous answer to our petitions, or a miraculous token of their acceptance, is not to be looked for. Such extraordinary discoveries of the grace and the power of God, were confined to the primitive ages. But the divine promise standeth fast—it is to us as it was to our fathers, and it will be to our children as it is to us, the promise of overflowing love and unchangeable faithfulness, that “if we ask we shall receive, if we seek we shall find, if we knock it shall be opened to us.”

Let us now attend to the prayer which was preferred by the Apostles on this occasion.

It begins with adoration. “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.” Such an ascription of universal power and authority is always seasonable in our addresses to the Supreme Being. It is not

only just and becoming, but it serves to keep alive upon our minds those sentiments of reverence with which he ought ever to be approached, and those feelings of dependence, and of trust, and of security, which are necessary alike to our character and our comfort. In the prayer of the Apostles it was peculiarly appropriate. They were about to supplicate from God his interposition in their behalf, that they might be enabled to stand firm in the midst of the threatened persecution, and to perform such miracles as would give efficacy to the doctrine which they taught ; and, therefore, they devoutly acknowledged and humbly appealed to that Almighty energy which had created the universe, and which, consequently, could easily accomplish all that they desired or needed. The attribute of Omnipotence could find no difficulty in altering that course, or suspending those laws, which it had originally established ; and the Goodness under whose direction it had brought the natural world into existence, was still alive to prompt and to guide

its exercise in effecting that new creation in the moral world, which it was the object of the Gospel to reveal and to promote.

The Apostles next referred to the prophecy, contained in the Scriptures, respecting the opposition which the Messiah and his religion should encounter in the world. "Who, by the mouth of thy servant David, hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord, and against his Christ." In these words, (contained in the 2d Psalm,) it was predicted, that Christianity would not obtain ready and peaceable possession of the faith and obedience of mankind; that a most zealous and formidable resistance would be made to its introduction and establishment; that kings, and rulers, and people, forgetting their mutual jealousies and accustomed feuds, would combine in inveterate hostility against this scheme, and against its Author, and, of course, against its supporters; that such a confederacy, however, would

prove as vain as it was impious ; that being formed to defeat the purposes of God, and the work of him whom he had sent to execute these purposes, it must, sooner or later, terminate in the disappointment and destruction of those with whom it originated, or by whom it was conducted. Believing the prediction which they quoted to have this meaning, the Disciples directed their attention to it as at once affording an evidence of the truth of that religion of which they were Apostles, and containing a promise which tended to support and animate them in the midst of trial ; and as it had been uttered by a servant of God, and was an enunciation of his own purposes, they naturally pleaded it as a ground of application for his protection and assistance. His word was pledged to bring to nought the devices of their enemies, and to give a signal triumph to the Messiah's cause. The period was now come when those circumstances which had been predicted were actually come to pass, and when his divine interposition seemed necessary, and was

therefore to be expected. They accordingly bring forward this fact as an argument by which to urge their suit.

“For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Jesus was the child or Son of God in such a sense that he was worthy to be honoured even as we honour the Father. He was “holy,” so holy that his enemies and his judges could find no fault in him; and he was “anointed” or set apart to the high office of Redeemer, by having the Spirit without measure, and every personal and every official qualification that was calculated to command respect, and secure submission. All this, however, did not prevent the rulers of the land from conspiring against him, from persecuting him, and from putting him to death. Such treatment, indeed, may be considered as, in one view, originating in the divine appointment. There was

a plan devised in heaven for the redemption of sinners. All the means by which that plan was to be executed were determinately foreknown and fore-ordained of God; and, in the application of them, his over-ruling Providence operated with its characteristic righteousness and activity. But still the free agency of those by whom Jesus was rejected and slain was not destroyed. In the whole of the transactions which led to his crucifixion they obeyed the dictates and impulse of their own will, so as to be at once conscious of enjoying liberty of choice and of conduct, and justly responsible for the guilt they had committed. At the same time, the Apostles, far from losing sight of the practical sovereignty of the Supreme Being, and of his constant interposition in the affairs of human life, as well as in the course of the material world, lifted up their souls to Him, as one whose management and controul extended to every part and to every movement of the great system which Christ had introduced, and which they were now to be employed

in establishing. And as he had interfered in bringing about those events by which the prophecies of his own Word were fulfilled, with respect to the reception which the Messiah experienced both from Jews and Gentiles, so they now, with the same confidence, appealed to his interference for accomplishing the other part of the prophecy, by frustrating that hostility, which, having succeeded in putting Jesus to death, was transferred to those whom he had commissioned to "go and preach his Gospel to every creature."

"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants that, with all boldness, they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." The great object at which the Apostles aimed, that which engrossed all their attention, and kindled all their zeal, and animated all their prayers, was the propagation of the Gospel. To this they were appointed; for this they were willing to spend, and to be

spent; and in reference to this were all their labours among men, and all their petitions to God. On the present occasion, though fully convinced of the truth of their doctrine and the goodness of their cause, yet they were sensible of their weakness and insufficiency; they perceived the dangers to which they were exposed; they were aware of the multiplied difficulties in which they might be involved; and knew that, if left to the resources of their own natural wisdom and ability, they could have no hope of ultimate success. They, therefore, applied to Him from whom alone the assistance which they needed could come; and besought him to inspire them with all requisite courage; to dispel from their hearts all those fears, which outward perils operating upon innate timidity, were likely to create; and to embolden them to publish the message of salvation without compromise, and without reserve.

Something more, however, than mere boldness in speaking the word was necessary. To give their testimony and their

preaching full effect, it was requisite that they should be empowered to work miracles in the name of Jesus:—to work miracles, that they might demonstrate the divine presence to be with them; and to work miracles in *the name of Jesus*, that by the obvious connection which would thus be established between the miracles they performed, and the crucified Jesus from whom the power of performing them was derived, it might be forcibly and irresistibly impressed upon the Jews, that he was indeed their Messiah and their Lord.

This shews us the view which the Apostles had of the importance of miracles. Indeed we find, both from *their* language and from that of Christ before them, that miracles form the grand evidence on which the truth of our holy religion rests. Take away the reality of these, and then, however excellent Christianity may be in itself, and however beneficial in its tendency, it is reduced to a mere human speculation, without authority, and without effect. It becomes us, therefore, to examine them carefully, to

meditate upon them frequently, to regard them as the voice of God himself, and to open our minds with all humility and readiness to those convictions which a proper consideration of them is fitted to produce. And it becomes us,—especially such of us as have not very maturely reflected on this most important subject,—to be continually on our guard against those insidious attempts which are too often made to undermine that great foundation of our faith, by means of ridicule, and sophistry, and confident assertion, both in the course of conversation, and in the popular productions of literary or scientific genius. The subject of miracles has been frequently and laboriously argued; and we do not hesitate to say, that the reasoning which satisfied a Locke, a Newton, and a Boyle, is not to be set aside by the witless sneers or the unsupported opinions of any philosopher in these days, even though he be possessed of the most splendid talents, and the most extensive acquirements. It deserves at least to be treated with more respect, and weigh-

ed with more fulness, and accuracy, and candour, than infidels have ever yet bestowed upon it, before we give it up as either unsound or inconclusive. And surely it will be wise in us not to part with a system so full of purity and of consolation as the Gospel is, till those who would deprive us of it have discovered something of equal excellence to substitute in its place ; more particularly as this surrender is required for no other end, than to gratify those who cannot bear the idea, that God should condescend in mercy to reveal his will to man, or that he should so far interfere with his own creation, as to work a miracle for accomplishing the most benevolent of all his purposes.

The effect of the prayer which was put up by the Apostles is mentioned in the 31st verse. “ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together ; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the Word of God with boldness.” The place was shaken where they were assembled, just as

the upper room had been in which they were on the day of Pentecost. It indicated an extraordinary presence of Deity; and, from its being a repetition of what happened at the original outpouring of the Spirit, it was probably intended to recal to their minds the wonderful communications they had then experienced, and to inspire them with confident expectation of similar favour being manifested to them at this time. But, indeed, they were actually and immediately filled with the Holy Ghost. This Divine Person was imparted to them in a more than ordinary measure, and probably in a visible manner. And endowed, in consequence of his descent, and according to the import of their petition, with miraculous gifts more liberally than they had hitherto been, and feeling his secret but divine energy elevating them above all fear, they preached the Gospel with every degree of freedom and boldness,—bearing their decided testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, and insisting on the very truths for which they had been cast into prison,

and before the very men who had incarcerated, and forbidden, and threatened them.

This was a happy effect of the supplications which they had presented to God : but there was another pleasing and blessed effect produced on the temper and conduct of those who were thus the subjects of heavenly influence. The Holy Ghost operated in them, not only as the Spirit of power and might, but also as the Spirit of love, of brotherly kindness, and charity. “ The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” There subsisted among them the most cordial, intimate, and endearing friendship. There was no malice, no selfishness, no jealousy, no contention. They “ loved one another out of a pure heart fervently.” And the only emulation among them was, who should excel most in ardour of affection and in expressions of kindness.

The consequences of this were extremely beneficial—such indeed as might have been anticipated, and such as will always

flow from the cultivation of such dispositions and such virtues. The unanimity which prevailed among them inspired the Apostles with additional zeal and earnestness. Besides the miracles which they performed, there was a pathos and eloquence in their discourses, which at once convinced the understanding, and interested the hearts of those to whom they addressed themselves. And their testimony to the great fact on which the truth of Christ's Messiahship principally rested, was attended with uncommon efficacy. Both by those who spoke and by those who heard, the Gospel was experienced in all its energy and in all its loveliness. They were edified, and charmed, and delighted, with its gracious discoveries ; and while their souls glowed with gratitude to the Redeemer, in whom they trusted, and with benevolence to one another, they felt a peace and joy, which assimilated them in some measure to the blessed in heaven. " With great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus ; and great

grace was upon them all." O that the preaching of the Gospel among us were accompanied with such a blessing, possessed of such advantages, and attended with such success! My friends, while we profess and feel anxiety about the success of the Gospel, let us be diligent in employing all those means by which alone the knowledge and belief of it are to be promoted among men. And let us take care that we do not counteract our own endeavours, by a deportment that is inconsistent with the spirit and the precepts of Christianity. Let us be especially careful that we avoid all that strife and animosity, which, alas! prevail too much, to the discomfort of those who cherish them, and to the great scandal of our holy religion. And let us cultivate charity in all its branches—that charity of which our Saviour has set us such a bright example, which accords so much with the nature of his doctrine, and which was so useful and ornamental in the conduct of his primitive disciples. It will not only promote our mutual com-

fort, as it is essential to our personal character, but it will have a powerful effect in recommending the Gospel, as a system which is itself full of mercy, and thus intimates its origin to be with the God of love.

One expression of the confidence, and harmony, and kindness that reigned among the Disciples, consisted in their having a community of goods,—in such of them as had abundance renouncing the exclusive possession of that abundance, and entrusting it with the Apostles for the benefit and relief of the poorer members of the church. “Neither said any of them, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessed of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles’ feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” And then a particular instance is mentioned, which is probably

thus noticed by the historian as having been a remarkable sacrifice of personal interest to the claims of charity and public advantage. “And Joses, who, by the Apostles, was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles’ feet.”

Some of the enemies of Christianity have taken occasion from these circumstances to account for its original and rapid success, so as to exclude the divine agency, and at the same time to attack the disinterestedness and respectability of the Apostles. It has been alleged, that the Apostles enjoyed a great advantage by having the management of such a treasury as would thus be committed to their care; and that the poor would be very apt to become Christians, and flock in great numbers into a society, which was so liberal in providing a supply to their wants.

As such a groundless insinuation is not likely to injure, in the mind of any person,

the character of men, who, like the Apostles, had left their all to follow Christ, who had followed him through evil as well as good report, and were every day exposed to persecution and death on account of their adherence to his cause, we shall leave the insidious cavil to its own natural fate. The other part of the attack deserves a little more attention, as it is apt to impose upon the judgment which is not prepared for it by previous reflection on the case.

The fact mentioned by the historian does not at all account for the great increase that took place among the professors of Christianity, in so far as that increase is imputed to interested motives. For, in the *first* place, those who allege that the poor turned believers merely that they might get a temporary or permanent supply, forget all the while that, at the same time, they exposed themselves to certain persecution. Granting that they reaped an advantage by the change, it is not to be denied, that they also suffered a disadvantage. And whether many could be found, who,

for a pittance of charity, which could not greatly improve their situation, would subject themselves, in the most open and undisguised manner, to every species of punishment that malice or authority could inflict, is a question which we may safely leave to any person acquainted with the principles of human conduct to determine.

But, in the *second* place, the motive arising from poverty could not operate to any great extent. The fund from which the poor expected their supply was not inexhaustible. Indeed, if it is maintained to have been very large, the argument of our adversaries, as we shall see immediately, will be destroyed. But certainly it does not appear, that it could be so abundant as to furnish any powerful inducement to a multitude. If the prospect of receiving alms was a prevailing motive with a considerable number, it would soon defeat itself. The more success it had, the weaker it became; and in all probability, it could not operate long till it would cease to have any influence—especially when we recollect, that

the minds which were so selfish as to yield to it, would be at least equally selfish in avoiding a religious profession attended with so many dangers and inconveniences as that of Christianity was.

In the *third* place, If the *poor* were influenced merely by interested motives, by what motives, we would ask, were the *rich* influenced, when they embraced the Gospel? If a great multitude of the *poor* came into the church with the sole view of getting a supply to their necessities, there must have been a proportional number of *rich* to furnish that supply, and gratify expectation. They could not be all poor; there must have been many rich. Now what was there to persuade these men to become Christians, to renounce their worldly possessions, to grow at once so disinterested and so liberal, and not only to descend from a state of opulence or independence, but to exchange it for one of indigence, of persecution, and of suffering? What but a conviction that the Gospel was true,—a conviction arising from the mira-

culous works of the Apostles, and the constraining influence of divine grace,—a conviction, therefore, that our opponents must account for in some other way, before they can urge the fact we have been considering as any disparagement to the credit and character of Christianity ;—more especially as, in the case of the rich, it is a direct and positive argument, bearing distinctly on the merits of the system,—whereas, in the case of the poor, granting the fact as they would have it, it is little or nothing more than a statement affecting the purity of the principles by which certain individuals were actuated when they became nominal disciples of Jesus. The one affords presumptive proof of the truth of the religion itself; the other merely destroys the reputation of some by whom that religion was professed.

But we have to remark, in the *last* place, that the conduct of the believers gives no countenance to the allegation brought against the uprightness of their views and motives. If we apply for information on this point to the same source from which

we derive the knowledge of the other, we find no symptoms of insincerity, or of selfishness. They were “of one heart, and of one soul, and great grace was upon them all.” The peace, and love, and order, that reigned among them, shewed that they had experienced the renovating power of the Gospel. That there were a few who had intruded themselves into this pure and happy society from unworthy considerations, we readily admit. But we speak of the great majority; and we affirm, that, with respect to them, the assertion of our adversaries has no foundation in fact, and that both in relation to them personally, and through them in relation to the Gospel, it is utterly futile and contemptible.

The precise reasons which induced the primitive Christians to carry their mutual charity so far as to have all things common, we have not leisure at present to investigate or ascertain. But certainly the peculiar circumstances in which Christian society is now placed, render the imitation of their example unnecessary and impracti-

cable. While, however, such a practice is entirely out of the question, let us not forget to cherish the spirit with which, in their case, it was conducted. Let us live like brethren in unity. Though we differ in opinion, let us agree in affection. Let us "be at peace among ourselves," and, "as much as lieth in us, live peaceably with all men." Let us endeavour to accommodate one another in the offices of mutual kindness. Let the rich give of their abundance to the poor. And let all of us labour, in our several stations, and according to our several opportunities, to promote the harmony of the church of Christ, and the best interests of mankind.

LECTURE XVII.

LUKE xiii. 10—17.

10. *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath:—11. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.—12. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thy infirmity.—13. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.—14. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath-day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day.—15. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite! doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?—16. And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo! these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?—17. And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.*

OUR Saviour embraced every opportunity of instructing the people. He was anxious to correct the errors, both of doctrine and of practice, into which they had fallen, and to prepare them for the cordial reception of his Gospel. Accordingly, he not only ad-

dressed them on the subject of religion when they happened to collect in considerable numbers around him, but was especially careful to catch their attention on those solemn occasions, when they were disposed to be peculiarly serious, and when they assembled for the very purpose of engaging in the worship and service of God. At such times, and in such places, it required greater boldness to rebuke their sins, and to attempt a revolution in their belief,—because the priests and rulers were then more upon their guard against innovations, and more easily offended by reproof. But he never allowed danger to deter him from the conscientious discharge of duty. He paid a habitual regard to the instituted public ordinances of the Jewish church; he attended the synagogues, that he might join in the devotions that were there performed; and he faithfully executed the prophetic office with which he was invested, by inculcating on his countrymen, whenever it was in his power, the great and interesting doctrines of his kingdom. He was employed

in this manner—he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, when an opportunity was presented to him of performing a miraculous cure. “And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in nowise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

There are several circumstances here, worthy of remark.—As to the miracle itself, we may observe, that the person on whom it was wrought was in such a situation as to be a proper subject for it. She had a bodily weakness, which bent her together, so as to prevent her from raising herself, and standing upright. In this melancholy state she had been, not for a short, but for a long period of time; by which means it happened, both that her infirmity had become inveterate, and that she was certainly and generally known to be the

victim of disease. Now, Christ accomplished a perfect cure. He did it without the application of any human remedy, to whose virtue it might have been imputed, and without any parade or bustle, which might have been thought to conceal the arts of deception. The only action he employed was the imposition of hands—to point out, as it were, the person in whose behalf he was interposing; and the only language he used was the enunciation of her deliverance—to mark the connection that subsisted between the exercise of his power, and the event that followed. And all this was exhibited before an assembly that consisted more of enemies than friends, where there was every disposition and every facility for enquiring into its truth, and where, had it originated in artifice, that artifice could not fail to be detected and exposed. The publicity which Christ thus gave to the miracle, without, however, appearing to court it, is a presumption that he had no intention to delude; and as no discovery was ever made, or even pretend-

ed, of any fraud that he committed on their senses, we are left to the fair conclusion that it was real, and that, along with other facts of a similar kind, it proved him to have come from God.

We are told that the woman “ had a *spirit* of infirmity ;” by which it is meant, as we learn from the 16th verse, that her infirmity was occasioned by the hostility of Satan. It cannot be denied, that this was conformable to the general opinion entertained by the Jews in our Saviour’s time, respecting demoniacal influence. To this influence they attributed every remarkable distemper of the body with which any one was afflicted. The case before us, however, cannot be reasonably considered as an imaginary possession ; nor the statement of it as a mere accommodation to the prevalent idea. The language of the historian and of our Saviour is exactly what it would have been, had the disease been actually produced by the malignity of an evil spirit. Nor can we admit for a moment, that, in a case of this kind, which affects our re-

ligious notions, and also our mode of interpreting Scripture, they would, from complaisance to popular error, employ a phraseology which sanctions that error, and tends directly to mislead the church on an important subject. The terms in which they speak are not capable of such a gloss, unless we are entitled to allege, that they said one thing and meant another.

If we are questioned as to the reasonableness or utility of such professions, we answer, that the question is irrelevant when brought forward to determine a matter of fact. If the fact be plainly stated in the word of God, all speculation on these points is quite unavailing, so far as its truth and reality are concerned. But, indeed, there seems to be nothing irrational in the common doctrine concerning the existence of spirits. There seems to be nothing irrational in the idea, that they exercise a certain kind and measure of influence over human beings. There seems to be nothing irrational in the belief, that there are among *them* good and bad, as there are among

men. And there seems to be nothing irrational in supposing, that while the former are employed on errands of mercy to our race, the latter may be permitted, for wise purposes, to indulge their native malevolence in presenting temptations and inflicting injury. In all this, we can perceive nothing that is irrational—though philosophy, in her excessive zeal against superstition, is apt to stigmatise as absurd, what, on impartial deliberation, will be found equally consistent with reason and religion.

But we are not speaking so much of what happens under the administration of the divine government now, as of what took place at the original promulgation of the Gospel. And surely, when explaining a miracle which we allow to have happened, it is not very reasonable or consistent to startle so much at what is merely wonderful, as that, for the purpose of getting over it, we shall invert the rules of language, and understand the very contrary

of what it expresses. Besides, while we abide by the plain statement of a fact which is here presented to us, and account it sufficient that such a statement is found in the pages of an inspired writer, we see no difficulty in discovering an important purpose to be subserved, by allowing Satan to interfere at that period, in this and similar cases. Christ came to "destroy the works of the devil," as these affected the souls of men ; and to shew his power to accomplish a *spiritual* deliverance, he effected a *temporal* deliverance from the malice and dominion of the wicked one. By this display of divine might, he inspired with confidence, and imparted consolation.

Again, it is worthy of notice, that this poor, infirm, and almost helpless woman, was found in the synagogue. In the state of her body, she had an excuse for absence, which she might have pleaded with any one, and which all would have sustained. Yet, in spite of this, she went to the house of the Lord, that she might join in his worship, and hear his word.—Does this convey

no reproof to any professing Christians? Are there none among us who consult their outward conveniency more than their spiritual improvement?—none who, if their bodies are comfortable, care little about the welfare of their souls?—none who are minutely anxious about themselves as to this life, but shew no vehemence of desire to honour in his sanctuary the God who preserves them, and there to prepare themselves for the life that is to come?—none, in short, who act differently from this daughter of Abraham, whom our Lord commends, and whom it would not disgrace the fairest and the mightiest to imitate in the ardour of her piety?

Alas! it is to be feared that there are some among us to whom this description applies. We refer not to those who are wisely careful for the preservation of health, and refuse to sacrifice it unnecessarily on the altar of religious zeal. Health is a most precious blessing, and we are bound to watch over it for our own sake, for the sake of our families, for the sake of our

friends, and for the sake of the church, in promoting whose welfare it becomes us to be active. And there are some who, from delicacy of constitution, would act both foolishly and sinfully, if they did not, in this particular, exercise a more than ordinary caution. But to these we make no reference. We refer to those who make the state of their bodily health a mere *pretext* for neglecting public worship; who would be thought unwell, that they may be allowed, without censure, to “forsake the assembling of themselves together;” who would make the slightest ailment an apology to their conscience for not doing, what in truth they have no decided inclination to do. Unfortunately they are inconsistent, and their inconsistency betrays them,—shewing that their absence from the temple is owing not so much to the pressure of sickness, as to the want of cordial disposition. Let some scene of worldly amusement invite them to partake, or some prospect of worldly gain tempt them to active exertion, and they instantly for-

get their pains, and defy the elements, and think of nothing but the pleasure or the profit that is before them. But, in the same circumstances, let it be proposed to them to go to the house of God, and their trouble most seasonably returns to justify their refusal; they shrink from the duty to which they are called, as if the sky were big with tempest—as if there were “a lion in the streets”—as if “the pestilence were walking at noon-day.” Although, in both instances, it would perhaps be expedient not to expose themselves to danger; yet surely if they were sincere in their Christian profession, they would risk as much at least in the cause of religion as in the cause of the world, and trust as much to the care of Providence in the one case as in the other. Their not doing so is a demonstration, that they are deluding themselves with “a name to live while they are dead.” Let us carefully avoid the delusion. Let us all cherish a respectful and affectionate regard for the public ordinances of the Gospel. Let us have an abiding sense of their obligation

and importance. Let us study to acquire and to cultivate a heartfelt relish for them. Let us be "glad when it is said to us, let us go to the house of the Lord." And instead of conjuring up excuses which have no reality in our condition, and can meet with no approbation from our minds, let us cheerfully obey the invitation; and, in the garb of humility and in the spirit of devotion, let us present ourselves before God in his house of prayer. Thus "waiting upon the Lord," we have reason to expect a blessing. As this daughter of Abraham was healed of her bodily infirmity in consequence of meeting Christ in the synagogue, so may our attendance be rewarded with some good word—some serious impression—some gracious communication to the soul, that shall enable us to say, from happy experience, "It is good for us to draw near unto God."

It was usual with Christ not to perform a miraculous cure till he was asked to do it, and till there was an expression of faith in him on the part of the person that

was diseased, or of the person that applied. From this general rule our Lord departed on the present occasion. "As soon as he saw her, he called her to him," and healed her. But still there were peculiarities in her situation, which rendered her worthy of this merciful and uncalled for interposition. She was obviously an object of compassion. Her religious character seems to have been known to Christ, and to have been such as he approved of. Her appearance in the synagogue, notwithstanding her distressing infirmity, shewed that she "loved the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwelleth." And it is not improbable that she had been listening to Christ's instructions with that eager attention, and those docile dispositions, which were so suitable to their importance and authority, and which prepared her, in some measure, for entering into his spiritual kingdom.

Let us admire the condescension and the grace of the Redeemer, and let us confide in the power by which that condescension

and that grace are rendered availing to the salvation of his people. He is willing to “save us to the very uttermost;” and his ability is commensurate with his willingness. That eye which pitied this infirm and decrepid daughter of Abraham, beams upon us with the same kind and tender affection. That hand which was laid upon her as a token of her being “loosed from her infirmity,” is stretched forth, in all its saving strength, to break the fetters which bind us to sin, and the world, and death, and to restore us to the energies and the joys of a new life. And that voice, which announced to her the deliverance that was effected in her behalf, is proclaiming to us, in the language of a “love that passes knowledge,” the pardon, the liberty, the happiness and the glory that he has secured for us by the blood of his cross. Let us cleave to such a Saviour, who, as it were, anticipates our prayers, and gives us blessings above the measure and proportion of our faith. Let us maintain that conduct which we know to be pleasing to him. Let

us seek him, and hold communion with him, and hearken to his word, in all the institutions which he has appointed. And in every respect let it be our endeavour to walk worthy of his mercy, that he may be glorified in us, and that we may rejoice in him.

We are told, that the woman “ glorified God.” She magnified his perfections ;—ascribing to his divine power the miraculous cure that had been wrought on her,—tracing up the benefit she had received to his unmerited mercy,—and praising him, with a grateful heart and a joyful voice, for such a glorious manifestation of these attributes. Surely it becomes us to be thankful in similar circumstances. When loosed from our infirmities, and restored to strength ; when raised from the bed of languishing, and blessed with renovated health ; when rescued from the agony of violent distemper, and given back to the friends who had almost bidden us farewell,—we are debtors to the sparing kindness of our heavenly Father. No supernatural interposition has

taken place for the accomplishment of our cure. But what is effected in the ordinary course of Providence, is just as certainly the operation of divine power and goodness, as if it had been done by the instrumentality of a miracle ; and, though not so striking, is as deserving of our grateful acknowledgments. If any of us, therefore, have been delivered from the power of bodily disease, let us give thanks to God ; and, instead of abusing the life which he has prolonged, to the purposes of ungodliness and vice, let us devote it, as we are bound in gratitude and duty to do, to his service and to his praise. And let us be especially grateful to him for curing us of the disease of sin, for emancipating us from the bond of Satan, for helping the infirmities of our souls, by the ministry of his Son Jesus Christ. These are blessings whose value is inestimable. We can never sufficiently prize, nor sufficiently acknowledge them. They render us the property of God. Let us “ glorify him, then, in our bodies and spirits, which are his.”

The conduct of Christ on this occasion gave great offence, and drew from one of the rulers an angry remonstrance. “And a ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work; in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.”

The ruler of the synagogue speaks very familiarly of Christ's miracles. His mind had never been properly affected by them. He had seen them, and believed not. And having habitually resisted their tendency to produce conviction and create respect, their frequency added to his indifference; and he spoke of them as things of course, the benefit of which the afflicted might command at any time. This language indicates an unhappy state of feeling on the subject; but any unfavourable impression which it may be calculated to make respecting the influence of Christ's miracles, is more than compensated by the ample and unqualified testimony which it bears to



the fact. There is no insinuation against the reality of those miracles—not the most distant allusion to them as if they had been mere deceptions practised upon popular credulity. Had that been the case, the censure would have been undoubtedly just ; and could the ruler have so much as pretended it, he would not have failed to bring forward the allegation as a reason for the displeasure that he expressed. But no ; he rests his vindication on another ground, and confesses unequivocally, both to the truth and the number of those miracles of which he ventured to speak so lightly.

Now, from this we infer an argument, which should have prevented him from finding fault with the people, or accusing Christ of a violation of the Sabbath. By the miracles which Christ wrought, he shewed that he had come from him who instituted the Sabbath ; who prescribed the sanctity which should belong to it ; who knew better than men could do what would be a real profanation of it ; who would not permit his delegated power to be employed

for such a purpose ; and who, at any rate, though he had prohibited his creatures, for their own benefit, from working on that day, could not be understood as having adopted the same rule for himself. Jesus, the Son of Man, being also the Son of God, and invested with divine authority, was Lord of the Sabbath. This reasoning, which our Lord employed on another occasion, was quite applicable here ; and had not the ruler been blinded by prejudice, and actuated by malice, he must have perceived its force, and felt himself restrained by it from expressing disapprobation. But, in truth, he found fault—not because he could discover any thing criminal in the conduct of Christ—but because he hated him, and wished him to be considered as a breaker of the law who deserved punishment, and deemed this an excellent opportunity of rendering him obnoxious to the Jews, who were strict and scrupulous to excess in the observance of the Sabbath. This was the motive which actuated him. And accordingly, you will remark, that Christ,

who perceived it distinctly, does not argue with him, as if he had merely erred through mistaken zeal, and was prepared to be guided by a better light. He does no more than charge him with gross inconsistency, and defend himself by shewing, that his conduct was not in the least degree more exceptionable than that of his enemies—that if, on either side, the sanctity of the Sabbath was violated, their violation of it was more culpable than his.

“The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite! doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, who is a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo! these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?”

Christ addresses the ruler under the odious appellation of hypocrite. He was entitled to employ this name. It expressed the real character, which was well known to his searching eye, and consisted in an affected zeal for the Sabbath, and a de-

cided enmity to the God of the Sabbath—in pretending to be better, and being in reality worse, than other men. But while Christ called the ruler of the synagogue a hypocrite, he justified the implied charge, and vindicated his own conduct, by a concise, but plain and satisfactory exposition of the case. Every one of the Jews—even the rulers and Pharisees, who should have been most strict and exemplary—every one of them supplied the wants of his ox or his ass on the Sabbath-day, though it cost him bodily labour; and did it without having any scruple in his own mind, or incurring any blame from others. This was permitted—and it was not merely lawful, but dutiful—as an act of that mercy in which the appointment of the Sabbath originated, and which extends to the lower animals as well as to man. But how could those who engaged in such work on such a principle, consistently find fault with Christ for healing this infirm woman? It was a deed of mercy which he performed. It required

no exertion that had even the appearance of labour—it was accomplished by a word and a touch. It was done to a human being—to one who was a daughter of Abraham, and with whom they were nearly connected—to a daughter of Abraham who had been bound by Satan, the enemy of God and man—and whose infirmity had weighed her down for eighteen years in severe and hopeless distress. If it was proper in them to be merciful to an ox or an ass on the Sabbath-day, much more was he entitled to be merciful to her on that day—to her who had so many claims on his compassion, and who could be cured without even the semblance of profanation.

It is a bad symptom of our religious principles, my friends, when our piety to God stands in the way of our kindness to our fellow creatures; when we suffer a regard to sacred forms to supersede the discharge of moral duties; when we leave a brother or a sister to groan in misery till the Sabbath, which was made for man, is over.

“ I will have mercy,” says God himself, “ rather than sacrifice.” And he who thinks and acts like the ruler of whom we have been speaking, regards, as he ought to do, neither the divine declaration, nor the divine example. Let us avoid such inconsistent and unworthy conduct.

But while we shun Pharisaical religion and Pharisaical morality, let us beware of entertaining loose notions, or indulging in a worldly observance, of the Sabbath. In running from one extreme, let us take good care that we do not plunge into another. Bad as both extremes are, licentiousness is by far the worst—worst in itself, and worst in its consequences. Let us consider seriously the scriptural institution of this holy day, the authority which has sanctioned it, the purposes for which it has been appointed, the benefits which it is fitted to confer on individuals and on society, and the ruinous effects which the abolition or profanation of it must produce on all that is best and on all that is happiest among

men ;—let us, as professing Christians, seriously consider these things, and, in the true spirit of the commandment, let us “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

LECTURE XVIII.

LUKE xiii. 18—30.

18. *Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?—19. It is like a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden: and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.—20. And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?—21. It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.—22. And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying towards Jerusalem.—23. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, —24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.—25. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are;—26. Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.—27. But he shall say, I tell you, I know not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.—28. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.—29. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.—30. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*

OUR Saviour had miraculously cured a woman in the synagogue, on the Sabbath-day.

The ruler of the synagogue was greatly offended at this, because he pretended to regard it as a profanation of that day which God had commanded them to keep holy. But Christ shewed that his offence was groundless; that his zeal for the strict observance of the Sabbath was a mere pretext, to conceal his malevolence and resentment; that, had he been sincere and consistent, he must either have condemned himself or acquitted Christ; that if it was lawful in him to lead out his ox or his ass to watering on the Sabbath day, much more was it lawful in Christ to exercise his mercy, by loosing from her infirmity on that day, a "daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound for eighteen years." The adversaries of Christ were ashamed on finding their hypocrisy thus detected and exposed, and the argument by which they intended to bring upon him the indignation of the multitude, so easily and effectually turned against themselves. And, on the other hand, the people in general, not entering into the malicious views of their

rulers, but deeply affected by the display of divine power and mercy which they had just beheld, gave way to those emotions of joy which it was so well calculated to awaken.

Thus shall it sooner or later be with all the enemies, and with all the friends of Christ. The friends of Christ have always reason to rejoice in him. Their faith, penetrating the thickest cloud of adversity that can surround them, contemplates him as their Redeemer and their Lord, “able and willing to save them to the uttermost;” and thus believing in him, they “rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory.” What, then, must be their rapture, when faith shall be turned into vision; when all the temptations and troubles of this life shall be over; when, without one prejudice to darken their intellect, or one fear to agitate their hearts, or one passing doubt to impair their enjoyment, they shall behold the unveiled excellence of him who loved them, and be with him where he is, for ever!—But, alas! a far different fate is

reserved for the enemies of Christ. In this world they oppose him with a high hand,—blaspheming his name, trampling on his authority, ridiculing his Gospel, and triumphing in all this hostility, as if it were equally honourable and successful. But at length they die; their pride is humbled in the dust; and their eternal doom is sealed. On the morning of the resurrection they “awake to everlasting shame and contempt.” They say “to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” O! that such men would become wise while wisdom can avail them! O that, in this the day of their merciful visitation, they would be indeed ashamed of their wickedness, and repent of it, and “kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish from the way!”

On observing the effect produced by his answer to the ruler of the Jews, Christ took occasion to direct the attention of his audience to the prosperity which his kingdom should experience, in spite of all the enmi-

ty with which it might be assailed, and all the obstacles that it might have to encounter. He sets this prospect before them in two parables, which he had already employed for a similar purpose, and which are well fitted to convey and illustrate his idea. "Then said he, unto what is the kingdom of God like, and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden, and it grew and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again he said, whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

These parables are evidently intended to inculcate one general truth, but, at the same time, they hold out to us two separate views of the subject. They are intended to teach us, that the religion of Jesus shall be attended with ultimate and complete success. At first, it might appear contemptible. It had no splendour or mag-

nificence to attract the notice and raise the expectations of mankind. Even when examined by men of curiosity and wisdom, it seemed destitute of any quality that could secure for it a friendly reception, or an extensive effect. It was likely to be lost amidst the multiplicity of worldly contentions that bustled around it, or to be overpowered by the first assault that should be directed against its rising strength. But it was more than it appeared to be. It possessed within itself a principle of life which nothing could extinguish, and of energy which nothing could repel. It was under the protection of Him, who had destined it to spread and triumph, and whose purposes are not to be frustrated even by the rebellious combinations of a universe. And thus constituted, and thus preserved, the unfavourable circumstances in which it was originally placed could do it no injury. The malice and resistance which it might afterwards meet with, could not interrupt its course. Whatever might be contrived and executed to accomplish its destruction,

would even be overruled to promote its advancement. And the period would arrive, when, having overcome and outlived all opposition, its prevalence would be universal and complete.—This is the general assertion intimated by our Saviour respecting his Gospel.

The first of the two parables refers chiefly to its *extent*. As the grain of mustard-seed became in time a large tree, and afforded shelter, in its wide spreading branches, to the fowls of heaven ; so the Gospel, small and despised at first, should by degrees diffuse itself through the whole world, and impart its blessings to men of every kindred, and tongue, and people.—The other parable principally respects the *efficacy* of the Gospel. As a little leaven pervades the mass into which it is put, and at length assimilates it to itself, so the Gospel shall not only be received by those to whom it is communicated, but shall impress upon their understandings and their hearts, its own divine qualities, giving them the light, and holiness, and comfort, by

which it is so essentially distinguished, and making them fit for the enjoyment, by transforming them into the likeness of God.

And while these parables point out the extent and efficacy of the Gospel, they teach us, at the same time, the manner of its propagation. It is gradual. The mustard-seed did not spring up into a large tree in an instant. The leaven did not produce a change of quality on the three measures of meal all at once. So neither was the Gospel to dart, like a flash of lightning, from Judea to the four corners of the earth; nor was it to effect, in a sudden and miraculous way, the moral reformation of all those whom it should be instrumental in converting. It would require a series of ages, and the use of various means, in order to reach its appointed limits, and to produce its genuine effects. Its spread, indeed, might be occasionally checked, and its influence occasionally impaired. At some periods, and in some places, it might seem to be yielding to the blasts of adver-

sity, or might be actually superseded by the reign of ignorance and depravity. But still, upon the whole, it would be making progress. Under the fostering care and mighty guardianship of its great Author, it would silently but certainly work its way through every difficulty and every danger, and at length enrich the whole family of mankind with the knowledge and the hopes of salvation.

What an animating and glorious prospect is thus set before us! Let us rejoice in it as that which, in an eminent degree, will bring glory to God, and felicity to our race. Let us draw comfort from it, amidst all the discouragements with which the infidelity and wickedness that surround us are apt to distress our minds. Let us pray in our retirements, in our families, and in our solemn assemblies, that it may be speedily realised, according to the promise and the prediction of the word of God. Let us do more than pray—let us labour for its fulfilment, in the spheres in which Providence has placed us, with the talents which

he has bestowed upon us, and according to the opportunities with which he has favoured us. We can all do something in this great and good cause. Our supplications at a throne of grace—our attention to domestic duties—our countenance to institutions for religious instruction—our pious conversation, and holy example—our pecuniary contributions—our zealous co-operation with those who have united for the purpose of spreading Christianity over the face of the earth—all these may be made subservient to the grand object which every disciple of Jesus, and every friend of his species, will be anxious to promote—the propagation and the triumph of the Gospel. Let none of us neglect to do that something which is within our reach, and let us do it “with our might.” We must soon leave this scene of active exertion, and give in our account to Him who is at once the Saviour and the Judge of men. And if, at a dying hour, it is a consolation to the heart of the mere philanthropist to reflect on deeds of benevolence, by which his

brethren have been comforted, and on schemes of improvement which are to better the worldly condition of coming ages; O! what elevated and heavenly joy must we experience at our last moments, when we think of having been honoured to be fellow-workers with God in advancing the kingdom of his Son; when our imaginations travel into those distant and dark regions into which we have assisted to convey the word of light and life; and when, to the eye of our mind, as we are about to fall asleep in Jesus, there are opened up those fine visions of holiness and happiness which are unfolded in the volume of inspiration, and which are one day to bless with their reality all the inhabitants of the globe! It is true, there are many who indulge in no such anticipations, and contribute nothing—no, not even a wish—to their accomplishment. But God's purpose of mercy to the children of men shall be fulfilled notwithstanding. And happy—truly, and for ever happy—are those who have been diligent in supplying their lack

of zeal and service. It is to them a token of salvation. Their record is on high; and their "reward is exceeding great."

As Jesus was going through the cities and villages teaching, and journeying towards Jerusalem, some person put this question to him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" We are not informed, who that person was—whether it was an enemy or a friend; nor are we informed of the motive which actuated him. But it is clear, from our Lord's reply, that the question was an improper one, and that its impropriety consisted in the unprofitable and hurtful curiosity which it implied. Let us avoid all such inquiries and speculations. They are of such an abstruse and difficult nature, that we are not likely to obtain any satisfactory information, and, consequently, occupy to no purpose the time and the talents which should be employed in the investigation of subjects that are within the grasp of our faculties, and calculated to do us good. Even though we should be somewhat successful in pursuing them, and ar-

rive at conclusions which reason might approve, yet it is not improbable, that the only effect of this might be to whet our ambition to be wise “above what is written,” and to furnish us with the materials of vain glory, and of useless controversy. At all events, they have a direct tendency to mar our spiritual improvement, by withdrawing our attention from ourselves to fix it upon others, and making us forget our own duties, and our own character, in idle and frequently uncharitable discussions on the future destiny of our fellow men. To all who indulge in them, our Saviour here conveys a sharp reproof, and a practical lesson. He says to them, Your inquiry is utterly unbecoming, and to give a direct answer to it is consistent neither with my office, nor with your welfare. Your fellow-creatures, about whom you seem to be much concerned, are in the hands of a righteous and merciful God, and “to their own master they stand or fall.” Were you wishing well to them, or praying for them, or labouring to make them “wise unto sal-

vation," your conduct would be both benevolent and laudable. But merely to pry into their eternal state betrays a spirit which is neither the one nor the other. Let your chief regard be fixed on yourselves. Be mainly solicitous to ascertain your own spiritual condition, and to secure your own spiritual safety. "Strive ye to enter in at the strait gate."

The "strait gate" means the Christian character,—the character prescribed in the Gospel. It is called a "gate," because it is in consequence of our possessing this character that we are admitted into heaven, which is often represented under the similitude of a "city." And it is called a "*strait* gate," on account of the difficulties which we experience in forming and maintaining it—on account of the strictness of those principles, and of that conduct in which it consists.

Now, our Saviour exhorts us to "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate." The original word, which is here rendered "strive," is uncommonly emphatic. It signifies a

great deal more than mere earnest endeavour. It intimates, that we should contend with all our might; that we should struggle in the most zealous and resolute manner; that we should be in agony, as it were, in order to obtain the object of our desire.

It may be, that not a few of us have never attended to this exhortation, or to the full import of the terms in which it is given. And it may be, that not a few of us are very far from feeling those ardent desires, or making those strenuous efforts, which it denotes, that we may “enter through the gates into the city.” Surely, had we no other reason for striving, it is enough that we are exhorted to do so by the Lord Jesus Christ. Independently of the authoritative right which he has to command us, we may rest assured, that he will not lay upon us more than it is necessary for us to bear. He is too gracious to exact of us a single exertion, or a single sacrifice, which is not indispensable to our attainment of heaven. He knows what preparation is requisite for our admission there; he knows the

extent of our ability to make it; he knows all the dangers and difficulties with which it will be attended; he knows the value of the object to which we aspire; he knows the dreadful alternative we must suffer if we fail in attaining it;—with all these circumstances he is perfectly acquainted, and we may, therefore, be certain, that the service which he requires of us is demanded, because our performance of it is essential to our success in the pursuit of future happiness.

But that we may be the more stimulated to the duty which he here prescribes, let us attend to the reasons by which it is recommended and enforced.

“For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

This is an alarming consideration. Christ tells us, that there are many—not a small number, but many—who shall desire and aim at admission into heaven, but shall be disappointed; their desire shall not be gratified; their aim shall not succeed. And why? Because God is not merciful?—be-

cause he is not willing that they should be saved?—because he is “unrighteous to forget” their “work of faith, and their labour of love?” O, no! such is not “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He will exclude the persons we are speaking of from the kingdom of heaven, because they are unfit for entering into it. They had a wish to be there; they laid their account with admission; they comforted themselves with the prospect of it: but then they were all the while living in indolence and sin. They either made no effort at all, or their efforts were totally inadequate. They were not careful to cherish the principles of the Gospel, to cultivate pious and holy affections, to repress the corruption of their own hearts, to resist the assaults of temptation, to deny themselves to the world, to “walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,” and to pray for that grace and strength which they needed for upholding and conducting them in “the path of righteousness.” On the contrary, they forgot that heaven of

which they expected to become inhabitants, and fixed all their attachments on the pleasures and pursuits of this earth. They forgot that God, the enjoyment of whose presence in heaven constitutes the chief portion of its happiness, and “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” They forgot that Saviour by whose blood heaven was purchased and secured; and, in their own righteousness or in uncovenanted mercy, laid a foundation for the hopes which they entertained. In short, they forgot to obtain those qualifications which the exercises and enjoyments of heaven expressly required them to possess, and acquired habits of thinking, and feeling, and acting, that were utterly incompatible with that immortality to which they aspired. On this account, though they sought to enter into heaven, they were not able.—Let us be taught by this, that it is not sufficient that there is a heaven, or that we have a desire to attain it, or that we even do something that it may finally become ours. Nothing less will do than

our possession of that character to which the promise of heaven is annexed in the Gospel. And as we are assured, that there are many professing Christians who shall, if they continue what they are, be ultimately excluded, let us anxiously inquire, whether we be of that unhappy number, by endeavouring to ascertain, whether we are only *seeking*, or whether we are actually *striving* to enter in at the strait gate. Let us apply to ourselves the test of Scripture. Let us judge of our fitness for heaven by that standard which God has given us in his word. And let this be done under the awful impression, that when once our future condition is fixed, it is fixed for ever.

“ When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer, and say unto you, I know you not whence you are.”

This is addressed to those who, amidst all their carelessness and guilt, cherish a presumptuous dependence on the divine mercy.

They flatter themselves, that though they be perverse and obstinate sinners to the very last, God will never be so severe as to execute upon them the judgments which he has threatened; and that, even though they die in impenitence, they have only to appeal to his compassion, and earnestly to ask admittance, that the gate of heaven may be opened to them. No delusion can be grosser, more dangerous, and more fatal than this. It is to confound all the moral distinctions that are found in the character of God. It is to set at nought every thing that is most sacred and most awful in his government. It is to deny the truth, and despise the solemn declarations of his word. We are placed in this world, that we may prepare ourselves for the next. And means the most liberal and effectual are provided for us of escaping "the wrath to come," and becoming "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." If we wilfully and ungratefully neglect these, are we to expect that it shall be equally well with us as if we had embraced and improved them?

Is the whole system of the Gospel to go for nothing, because we choose to disregard both its grace and its godliness? Will the Almighty indeed disturb the harmony of his perfections, and frustrate the whole purpose of his administration, by rewarding indiscriminately the righteous and the wicked? Or can it be asked even without a species of impiety, whether the great Sovereign of the Universe will give a crown of glory to those who were, to their dying moment, equally heedless of his promises and his threatenings, just because, to all their other sins, they were pleased to add that of an unwarranted and daring confidence in his goodness—a confidence in his goodness, which implied a disbelief or an impeachment of all his other attributes? It is utterly impossible for the most abandoned deliberately to hold such unworthy sentiments. No, my friends, these things cannot be so. God indeed is merciful; but he is also holy and just. So long as we are in life, we have a foundation on which to build the richest and the brightest hopes;

but the moment that we enter the confines of eternity our fate is unalterably fixed. And if we have gone there, transgressors of God's law and despisers of his Gospel, then, tremendous and appalling as the declaration is, it must be stated, that to us he has "forgotten to be gracious," and that "his mercy is clean gone from us for ever." The gate of heaven is shut against us. No request for admission will be listened to. No profession of respect and obedience will avail to change or mitigate our doom. The sentence is pronounced, and everlasting ages must witness its execution. Let none of us murmur at this prospect. We have no title to do so. "The Judge of all the earth will do right." If its horrors are experienced by us, the fault and the blame are our own. We have an "accepted time,"—a "day of salvation." Let us, then, "listen to the voice of God to-day, and harden not our hearts." A Saviour is offered to us; let us accept of him. The path of life is pointed out to us; let us walk in it. The work of preparation is prescribed

to us; let us perform it. Almighty aid is provided for us; let us embrace it. Let us “*strive* to enter in at the strait gate,” and “so an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

But there is another practical error which our Lord here endeavours to correct. “Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity.” This is directed against those who pay more attention to their privileges than their conduct; and is intended to teach us, that though the former be great, they are of no consequence unless the latter be such as God requires. Religious advantages, no doubt, are valuable and precious. They are tokens of divine goodness. And they are calculated to promote our best interests. But they become absolutely nothing to us—they contribute nothing to our salvation, if our character be inconsistent with them.

To what purpose is it, that we have eaten and drunk in Christ's presence at a communion table? To what purpose is it, that he has taught us by his word, and by his ministers? To what purpose is it, that we have received from him, in the course of his Providence, every means of grace, and every opportunity of instruction, that we can possibly desire? To what purpose are all these things, if, notwithstanding, we are destitute of the principles which these were designed to cherish, and of the deportment which these were fitted to produce? To what purpose would it be, that we were admitted to all the familiarity and all the benefits enjoyed by the twelve disciples, if, like Judas, we should remain under the dominion of evil passions, and betray Jesus, by our sins, into the hands of our enemies? It could be of no avail whatever. It would still remain true, that "without holiness no man can see the Lord," and that "the wicked, who forget God, shall be turned into hell." And still would the Judge of men have to pronounce upon us the sen-

tence that is here recorded, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." Nay, our guilt, and consequently our punishment, are aggravated in proportion to the extent of our privileges. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to that man it is sin." "The servant that knew his master's will, and did it not, the same shall be beaten with many stripes." "To whom much is given, of them the more shall be required." Let us beware, then, of placing any reliance on the mere possession of outward privileges. Let us not consider ourselves as warranted on that, or on any account, to indulge in one known sin, or to violate one known duty. Let us rather feel and fulfil the obligation which they lay us under to be strong in the faith, and distinguished in the obedience of the Gospel. So that having improved our five talents to the utmost, we may obtain the approbation of our Lord, and enter into his joy.

How highly favoured are we, my friends, with religious privileges! How grateful ought we to be to God, who, in this re-

spect, has exalted us above every other people in the world ! And how faithful and diligent ought we to be in living to the praise and glory of Him who has conferred upon us so many and such inestimable blessings ! Let us take care that we do not fall into the same condemnation with the Jews, for whose warning and instruction this discourse of our Saviour was originally delivered. There will, indeed, be “ weeping and gnashing of teeth,” if we be doomed to “ see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God,” and we, the very least of whom is, in point of outward advantages under the Gospel dispensation, greater than the greatest of *them*, “ thrust out into utter darkness ;”—if men “ from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south,” who seemed to be involved in perpetual ignorance and degradation, shall come and “ sit down in the kingdom of God,” while we, on whom the sun of righteousness has been always shining, shall be excluded from that region of happiness and

glory;—if they, who are now last and lowest in those privileges on which we value ourselves so much, shall be exalted to the first and most eminent seats of bliss in heaven, while we, to whom God has given all that can make us holy and happy, must take up our abode in that place where “the worm dieth not, and the fire shall never be quenched.”

It is in mercy that Christ has thus declared what his justice will finally execute. Let us listen to the voice of his mercy, that we may not be overwhelmed by the award of his justice. Let us “strive to enter in at the strait gate.” Let us ever be engaged in this important and necessary struggle. Let us be always “walking worthy of our high vocation,” of our privileges, and our prospects. In the exercise of faith and prayer, and in the practice of godliness and good works, let us “wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;” for “blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing.”

LECTURE XIX.

LUKE xiii. 31—35.

31. *The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence; for Herod will kill thee.—32. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.—33. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.—34. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!—35. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

OUR Saviour had been itinerating in Galilee, for the purpose of establishing his mission, and spreading his Gospel. His labours were abundant, and his success was not inconsiderable. He performed miraculous cures on those who were diseased. He addressed discourses to the people, full of interest and importance. And, in con-

sequence of what they heard and saw, many believed on him, and rejoiced for all the glorious things that he had done. The favourable impression which he had thus made on the public mind, gave offence, as usual, to those who were hostile to his person and his cause. These were chiefly, on this occasion, the *Pharisees*, and *Herod the Tetrarch*.

The Pharisees were his most inveterate enemies. They hated him because his doctrine was in opposition to all that they had been accustomed to deem most sacred in the religion of their fathers. They hated him, because, in the course of his instructions, he had rebuked them for their vices, and exposed their errors to public abhorrence. And they hated him, because by this means, and by means of his own inoffensive, pious, and benevolent conduct, he was attracting that popular respect and attachment which they were anxious to retain to themselves. For these and other reasons of a similar kind, Jesus was to the Pharisees a perpetual object of jealousy and

malice. They watched his whole conduct—all that he said and all that he did—for grounds of accusation. Every new convert that he gained, only added fuel to their resentment. And the most vehement desire that inflamed their minds, seems to have been that of accomplishing his destruction, by whatever means such a malevolent end could be attained.

As to Herod, he had not so many or such powerful reasons for his aversion and enmity to Christ. It even appears, that the fame of Christ's character and miracles had excited so much interest and curiosity in his mind, that he had a strong inclination to see him. Yet it was scarcely possible for a man of his dispositions, and in his situation, to feel towards Christ any sentiments but those of dislike. Herod was a wicked prince, and Christ would not have hesitated to administer to him the severe rebuke which his crimes deserved. Herod was governor of the country in which Christ was now labouring, and might consider his authority in some degree of dan-

ger from one who possessed so much influence among the people, and was daily acquiring more. At any rate, Herod had a temper so depraved, so cruel and vindictive, that the least obnoxious action of a person like Christ was quite sufficient to kindle all his malevolence, and bring down upon his innocent subjects the most remorseless persecution.

That Herod and the Pharisees were equally desirous to destroy Christ, no doubt can be entertained. But wicked men are frequently restrained by policy, when they are utter strangers to principle: the fear of some worldly disadvantage will often check a passion which would otherwise have broken down all the barriers of justice and humanity. And thus it was in the case before us. Both Herod and the Pharisees would have gladly taken away the life of Christ; but such an attempt, in the existing circumstances, would have been inconvenient and hazardous. He had a strong hold of the affections of the people; and any violence done to his person, while these

affections were in their full warmth and vigour, might have produced insurrection and tumult—ruined that controul which the Pharisees endeavoured to maintain over the multitude, and involved Herod in difficulties which it was safest for him to avoid. They had recourse, therefore, to a qualified measure. They merely employed the language of intimidation. The Pharisees represented to Christ the willingness or determination of Herod to put him to death; advising him, at the same time, to save himself from the threatened vengeance, by departing immediately out of the country. And in this manner they flattered themselves, that, without risking their own safety or authority, they would succeed in frustrating his labours, or at least interrupting them, in that district with which they were more particularly connected. “The same day”—while he was busy in inculcating upon the people the most momentous truths to which their attention could be directed—“The same day, there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee

out and depart hence ; for Herod will kill thee."

How infatuated were these men, to try to banish from their presence and their neighbourhood one so worthy of their respect, so well fitted to instruct them, and so willing to do them good, as Jesus Christ ! They indeed " forsook their own mercies ;" and equally sacrificed true wisdom and real advantage at the shrine of passion. Let us avoid the folly and the guilt of such conduct. Christ, by his word and his ordinances, has come into our land. He has spoken to the people, as their teacher, their Saviour, and their Lord. By the power of his grace, he has " done among them many wonderful works." His Gospel has enlightened the ignorant, converted the wicked, edified the good, and comforted the sorrowful. And from none of us has he withheld one spiritual blessing that we needed, and " asked of him in prayer, believing." Instead, therefore, of regarding him with aversion or with indifference, let us welcome him with every

feeling of cordiality and respect. Let us listen to him reverently, whether he communicates doctrine or precept—whether he speaks the language of reproof or of consolation. Let us beseech him to continue with us his gracious presence. Let us, in every respect, walk worthy of this distinguished privilege—by improving in that knowledge which he imparts—in that faith which rests upon him—in that holiness which his law requires. Let us rejoice, that so many amongst us have already received him, not in name only, but also “in deed and in truth.” Let us be anxious that this reception of him should be still more extensive, and still more efficient. Let us contribute to this great object, our prayers, our influence, our exertions, our talents. And let us sacrifice, without a grudge, every private interest, every partial affection, every petty jealousy, every trifling difference of opinion, that might operate as a bar to its complete attainment—satisfied, as every true Christian must be, that wherever the religion of Jesus Christ prevails in

spirit, and in purity, and in power, it is at once the happiness of individuals and the glory of a state.

Let us attend now to the answer which our Saviour gave to the admonition and threatening of the Pharisees. “And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.”

Our Saviour calls Herod a *fox*. He deserved the name—for he was cunning, treacherous, and cruel. And it was more especially appropriate on this occasion, because, while Herod was wicked enough to thirst for the blood of Christ, he was sagacious enough also to perceive, that any open violence might have been injurious to himself; he therefore aimed merely at his banishment, by artfully holding out threatenings against him, if he remained under his jurisdiction.

When Christ gave Herod the denomination here mentioned, he indeed used strong language. But it was in no view unwarrantable. It was perfectly just and applicable ; for it most aptly described the general temper and character of that prince, and indicated the nature of his conduct in this case in particular.—It was employed in the exercise of legitimate authority. The forerunners of Christ in the prophetic office had been in the habit of using the utmost plainness of speech, when addressing wicked princes whom they were sent to warn and reprove, and of characterising them under the names of those savage animals whom they most resembled in their dispositions and conduct. And surely if they could with propriety display such freedom with the civil rulers to whom they were sent as messengers from God, much more might it be displayed by Christ, who was intimately acquainted with the heart and character of every human being, who was the great Prophet that should come into the world, and to whom “ the Father

had committed all judgment ;” and more especially was it competent for him to use it, when speaking of one who, like Herod, was so profligate, and had so inhumanly murdered John the Baptist.—Besides all this, it was seasonable and expedient, inasmuch as the metaphor shewed to the Pharisees and to Herod, in the most emphatic way, that Christ was fully aware of the deception they were practising, and formed an appropriate introduction to that defiance with which he met the threatenings that were employed to deter him from the discharge of his duty.

But though, in every point of view, our Saviour was justified in using and applying the term in question, we must be cautious here in imitating his example. The general law for us to observe is contained in these words,—“Thou shalt not speak evil of the rulers of the people.” And before we venture on any such exceptions to it, as that which we have been considering, we must not only have good ground to stand upon in point of justice, but also in point

of right and authority. It is not meant, indeed, to inculcate a passive, slavish spirit, or an abject, uncomplaining submission to oppressive and abandoned rulers. It is not meant to teach, that we should say nothing but what is good and gentle of tyrants and wicked men who may be set over us; or that we should not, on fit occasions, call them by their proper names. No: it is only intended to guard the followers of Christ against viewing any particular expression which he used, or any particular action that he performed, as a precedent and a warrant for them to do likewise, unless they are not merely placed in similar circumstances, but also entitled to act the same part, in virtue of the office or character with which they are invested, or by a sound regard to the great interests of freedom and humanity.

The defiance which our Lord sent to Herod was bold and determined. He regarded the menaces that had been held out, as nothing. They did not weigh so much as a feather in the balance against his strong

sense of duty, and his firm resolution to discharge it. His purpose was formed; his plan was laid; his task was assigned; and no apprehensions of danger could prevent him from prosecuting, and no strength of opposition could prevent him from fulfilling it.

“ I cast out devils, and I do cures.” Here our Saviour signifies, that in no respect could they prevail upon him to resign his pretensions, to desist from his labours, or to deviate from the path he was pursuing. He was to persevere in doing good to those who needed his assistance; in establishing his claims to be received and submitted to as the Saviour of sinners; and even in performing those works which had rendered him most obnoxious. He had no pleasure in giving offence to others; but the fear of offending never made him shrink from his official obligations, nor induced him, in any one instance, or in any one degree, to compromise the dignity of his character. And here, in the face of Pharisical enmity, and in despite of princely

power, he intimates his intention, fixed and unequivocal, to proceed, as he had been hitherto doing, in the accomplishment of that grand object for which he had come into the world.

“ I cast out devils, and I do cures, *to-day and to-morrow.*” The expression *to-day and to-morrow* is not to be understood literally. But, according to a phraseology not at all uncommon in Scripture, and not at all uncommon in ordinary language, it means a *short period of time*. Christ had still something to execute. His personal ministry was not yet completed. There was not much indeed that remained; and it was but a small portion even of that which remained, that could be transacted in Galilee. Still, however, this was necessary, and he could not forego it, without relinquishing his post, and acting inconsistently with his divine commission.

“ And the third day I shall be perfected.” At the conclusion of the short period referred to, Christ was to be *perfected*. He was to “ finish the work which the Father

had given him to do." He was to finish it by becoming "obedient to death, even the death of the cross." This was an essential part of the divine plan. And as it must therefore certainly be accomplished, Herod and his other enemies were idle in so anxiously seeking after his life. Very soon he was voluntarily to shed his blood—thus to perfect, to sanctify, or consecrate himself for evermore, as the great high priest of his people. And then, in the very event which was to procure salvation for all who should believe in his name, the wishes of those who now sought to destroy him would be fully gratified. But that was an event independent of them. They could neither hasten nor retard it. It was determined in the councils of heaven. And when Christ was perfected on the cross, it was in conformity to the appointment of Almighty God.

It becomes us, my friends, to act with that steady perseverance, which on this, as on every other occasion, distinguished our Lord Jesus. We also have a work given

us to do—the work of faith and obedience—an interesting, an important, a necessary work,—a work which is to be done in this life, but which extends, as to its effects and consequences, into all the ages of eternity. Let us devote ourselves to the performance of it with all the zeal and activity that we can command. Let us engage in it under just impressions of its infinite moment; and, remembering that the salvation of our souls depends upon it, let us labour with all our might to advance in it with unceasing progress, so that we may at length bring it to a happy termination. We shall have difficulties to encounter, dangers to struggle with, sacrifices to make, pains to endure, enemies to combat. But “none of these things must move us.” The resolution which supported Christ, must be adopted by us. We must be firm to our purpose. It is a holy one, and nothing can ever justify us in deserting it. It is worthy of every effort, and of every suffering that it may cost us; and therefore we must be ready to part with

all things, even with life itself, rather than leave any portion of it unheeded or unaccomplished.

Brethren, the time for performing this work is limited. It consists but, as it were, of "to-day and to-morrow." The longest life that any of us can anticipate, is but short, when we take a serious and comprehensive view of what we have to do. Let us not, therefore, trifle away the precious hours that should be occupied with religion and the care of the soul, on the vanities of the world, and the gratifications of the body. Let every moment be deemed of value, and improved to its proper purpose : and let our diligence be quickened by the consideration, that our time is as uncertain as it is short. It is fixed in the appointment of God, and its length is known to him ; but from us it is concealed. And therefore we should make no delay in applying ourselves to the work that is allotted us. Nothing should be allowed to divert our attention from it. We should be perpetually " giving all diligence to make our calling and

election sure." We should "work the work of God while it is day, as the night shall soon and may unexpectedly come, when no man can see to work."

And while the shortness of the time is a powerful inducement for us to be active and diligent, it may also help to comfort us under the trials, and difficulties, and sorrows, to which our labours in the work of the Lord may subject us. The duration of these cannot, of course, be long. They "last, as it were, but for a moment." Why, then, should they discourage or cast us down? Severe and multiplied though they be, they must soon be over. Let us bear them "to-day and to-morrow, and the third day we shall be perfected." If we have been faithful and obedient, we shall, ere long, "rest from our labours, and our works shall follow us." We shall be delivered from the pressure and from the fear of every evil. We shall be perfected in *faith*, which shall then be exchanged for the vision of those grand realities which are to be found in the celestial world. We

shall be perfected in *hope*, which shall then be turned into the actual enjoyment of all that can satisfy and delight our souls. We shall be perfected in *holiness*, sanctified wholly by the divine Spirit, washed from every sinful pollution, and made altogether meet for inhabiting that “new heaven and new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness.” We shall be perfected in *happiness*, whose stream shall flow into our bosoms, rich, and pure, and perpetual. And we shall be perfected in *glory*, of which the Saviour will bestow upon us an immortal crown.—Animated by the prospect of these things, let us “be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.” Let every new year, every succeeding month, every returning day, find us “growing in grace,” increasing in knowledge, active in duty, “sober and watching unto prayer,” “walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord,” and “pressing on to-

wards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"Nevertheless," said Jesus, "I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." Herod might do his utmost to kill him; but it would be in vain; because the wisdom and the sovereignty of God had determined otherwise. Jesus was to suffer at Jerusalem; and therefore he felt no anxiety about the threatenings that Herod might utter, or the attempts that he might make against him. With or without his permission, he would go on to discharge the functions of his high office, teaching and working miracles, as the occasion might require, refreshing the inhabitants of Galilee with the blessings that he scattered on his way, and steadily pursuing that path which was soon to terminate in Calvary and the cross, in suffering and in death. How simple, yet how dignified, was this deportment of our Lord! What unwearied benevolence did

he exhibit ! what diligence in duty ! what fortitude, and perseverance, and tranquillity, in the near prospect of his last and bitter agony !—God grant that we, his professed disciples, may have “ the same mind which was in him,” and may be enabled to “ walk even as he also walked !”

“ For it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.” It could not be supposed, either in point of right or in point of fact, that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. It could not be supposed in point of right ; for the Jewish Sanhedrim claimed it as their exclusive privilege, to judge of the pretensions of every prophet, and to determine whether they were true or false. Neither could it be supposed in point of fact ; for history shewed, that the supreme court had not only exercised the power of trying, but had actually abused that power, by condemning and putting to death almost all the messengers of God. The assertion is not meant to be absolute and universal. John the Baptist had been lately slain in Galilee by this very Herod. Still, however,

it was true to such an extent, as to warrant the language of our Saviour. The treatment which they had given to those whom God sent, from time to time, to instruct and reclaim the people, manifested so much disregard to the principles of justice, to the feelings of humanity, and to the authority of God, as to render it altogether improbable that *he* should escape the merciless awards of their tribunal. He not only pretended to be a prophet, and in the exercise of that character rebuked them freely and boldly for their iniquities, but he pretended to be the great prophet who was to come for the redemption of Israel; and his doctrine, his appearance, his conversation, and his conduct, though full of wisdom, and grace, and truth, were so contradictory to their notions of the Messiah, and so obnoxious to their corrupted sentiments on the subjects of religion and morality, that they could not fail to provoke their displeasure and resentment in no ordinary degree. The inference, therefore, necessarily was, that if they had persecuted so many other pro-

phets to the death, this persecution certainly awaited him as soon as he came within their reach. What a reproach did this convey against Jerusalem and against the Jewish council, and alas ! how just ! Jerusalem, the city of God, distinguished by so many privileges, became, as it were, the slaughter-house of God's servants. And the Jewish council, who were appointed to guard his worship and to protect his people and his messengers, prostituted their honourable distinction, so as to make it the instrument of revenge, and oppression, and murder. What dreadful guilt was implied in this conduct, and what awful judgments did it deserve from the hand of the Almighty !

It was the consideration of these things that drew from Christ the affecting apostrophe which he here addresses to the city of Jerusalem. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee ; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings,

and ye would not ! Behold your house is left unto you desolate : and verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." When we reflect on all the circumstances of the case, it must be allowed, that scarcely any thing can be conceived more pathetic, and, at the same time, more sublime than this. It speaks to every heart. And I shall not endanger its beauty, or weaken its impression, by any paraphrase or commentary of mine. Only let us not forget to notice and to improve by the practical lessons which it affords.

It should lead us to reflect on our religious privileges, and on our conduct, that we may see how far they correspond. Our religious privileges have certainly been great. But it is to be lamented, that we have not been sufficiently grateful for them—we have not sufficiently prized them—we have not sufficiently improved them. Nay it is to be feared, that, in many instances, we have wantonly abused

them, and sinned with a high hand, because divine mercy has abounded. We have allowed year after year to pass away, without making any progress in a life of godliness. And though “days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom,” we have, in too many cases, remained in ignorance and sin—as if ignorance were our honour, and as if sin were our safety, and our happiness. O! let us be deeply humbled under convictions of our guilt. Let us repent of it with sincerity of heart. This day let us be resolved, that we will no longer neglect the great salvation—that we will improve our advantages to the utmost—that having the Word of God, we will read it—that having our Sabbaths, we will keep them holy—that having an open sanctuary, we will go to it—that having a throne of prayer, we will approach it in faith—that while we use the means of grace with diligence and zeal, we will endeavour to cherish those principles, to cultivate those dispositions, and to maintain that conduct, to the formation and improve-

ment of which they are intended to be subservient—in short, that if, in the year that is past,* we have been remiss, and thoughtless, and worldly, we will study, in the year on which we have now entered, and as long as God shall be pleased to spare us, to devote ourselves to his service, and to his glory. Our neglect and abuse of privileges, indeed, has aggravated our guilt, and exposed us to the displeasure of him from whom we received them. But God is merciful, and Christ is able to save. He who wept over Jerusalem is just as compassionate now as he was then. He is calling us to take shelter under his wings till the indignation be overpast; and though we have wandered far from his protection, and have refused to listen to his voice, yet he continues to invite us to come unto him, and to encourage us by the richest promises of his grace. If we are hungry, he will feed us with the bread of life. If we are ignorant and heedless, he will guide us. If we are

* This Lecture was delivered on the 1st of January.

weak and helpless, he will guard us from every danger. O, then, let us embrace this affectionate and almighty Saviour; let us never again forsake him; and if it please the great Disposer of events that we should see the conclusion of another year, let that period find us “strong in the faith” of the Gospel, and adorned with all the fruits of penitence, and godliness, and virtue.

Christ is still seated on the throne of mercy; but the time is coming, and it cannot be distant with respect to any of us, when he will sit on the throne of judgment. Then will he no longer offer salvation to sinners—so often held out, and so often rejected—but pronounce and execute upon them that condemnation which they have justly incurred. Having despised the meekness and condescension, they must endure the wrath, of the Lamb of God; and under the apprehensions and pressure of that they will be ready and disposed to say, “Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Alas! that language will be too late; for he then cometh not to save, but

to destroy those “wicked persons who would not have him to rule over them.” He cometh “in the name of the Lord;” but it is to be “glorified in his saints, and admired of them that believe”—it is to “punish with everlasting destruction, those who have not known God, and obeyed the Gospel of his Son.” Anticipating that awful period, let us, in this the day of our merciful visitation, mind “the things that belong to our peace, before they be for ever hid from our eyes.” Let us lay down the weapons of rebellion. Let us be reconciled unto God by the cross of Jesus. And, henceforth, let us “serve him in righteousness and holiness all the days of our life.”

LECTURE XX.

LUKE xiv. 1—14.

1. *And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath-day, that they watched him.—2. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.—3. And Jesus answering, spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?—4. And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go;—5. And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day?—6. And they could not answer him again to these things.—7. And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them,—8. When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him:—9. And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.—10. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.—11. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.—12. Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee.—13. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the*

maimed, the lame, the blind:—14. And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

THE Pharisees, as we have had frequent occasion to observe, were Christ's bitterest and most ensnaring enemies. In the language of the Psalmist, "they compassed him about like bees;" they persecuted him from place to place; they embraced every opportunity of provoking his temper, and wounding his reputation; and when open assault could not be attempted, or did not succeed, they tried the more disguised arts of cunning and treachery.

A remarkable instance of this occurs in the passage that we have now read. Our Saviour had accepted of an invitation given him by one of the chief Pharisees, and gone into his house to "eat bread," to dine, or to take some refreshment "on the Sabbath-day." A considerable number of that sect, including some doctors of the law, were present on the occasion; not, however, for the purpose of doing honour to Christ, the most illustrious of all the guests,

or of receiving instruction from one so well qualified as he was to give them instruction, but for the purpose, it would seem, of spying his conduct, and of discovering in it some ground of accusation. We are told, that "they watched him." They observed him narrowly and invidiously; that, from something he might do on the day devoted to rest, or from something he might say in the course of conversation, they might have some plausible pretext, if not for calling him before the Jewish council, at least for representing him to the people as a person undeserving of their respect and esteem. In this unworthy object, however, they were disappointed. Christ foresaw their intention; and while he did not allow any apprehension of it to prevent him from a faithful discharge of duty, he acted so wisely and so well, as to render it completely ineffectual.

We, my Christian friends, are beset, like Christ, with persons who "watch" us; who wait for our halting; who rejoice to find us living like other men;—because it either gives them a handle for censuring

the religious character, or may be used to justify themselves in the vices and irregularities which they are at any rate disposed to practise. This is altogether, and in every point of view, unfair. When we, who profess the Gospel, are guilty of violating its precepts, that certainly reflects discredit on our sincerity, but neither proves the Gospel itself to be untrue nor unholy. Besides, as perfection is not pretended any more than it is attainable, occasional deviations from the path of rectitude, while they ought beforehand to be carefully guarded against, and afterwards deeply lamented, are surely no sufficient reason for concluding, that those who commit them are destitute of the principles of vital godliness and pure religion. And, beyond all controversy, let our delinquencies be as numerous and great as our worst enemies can *wish* them to be, they can form no apology for others, to whom the *law of God* is given as the rule of life, and who shall be judged according to that law, and not according to the example we may happen to set before

them. But although this be the case, yet knowing that there *are* persons who “*watch us,*” and knowing that the manner in which we demean ourselves before them is calculated to affect not only our own respectability but also the interests of religion in the world, let us be cautious and circumspect as to every part of our conduct. If, indeed, in any instance, the weight of religious or moral obligation lies upon us, let no fear of consequences prevent us from fulfilling it. Let not the dread of misapprehension, or of misrepresentation, or of any similar evil, deter us from the conscientious performance of any duty to which Providence calls us. But, at the same time, let Christian prudence regulate the whole of our deportment. Let us not only avoid what is in itself sinful, but let us also avoid, if possible, every thing which, however innocent in its own nature, might cause our “good to be evil spoken of.” Let us “walk in wisdom towards them that are without.” Let us “abstain, by all practicable means, from the very appearance of evil.” Let us even make

sacrifices of personal conveniency and personal comfort for the attainment of this desirable end. And while we give no handle for the enemies of Christ to "blaspheme that worthy name by which we are called," let us study to make our "light so shine before them, that, seeing our good works, they may glorify our Father in heaven."

Besides the caution now given, there is another which is suggested by the passage before us, and which is especially necessary to be observed by young and inexperienced Christians. It is this, that we associate as little as possible with those who may be inclined to watch us as the Pharisees watched our Lord. Our Lord was quite aware of their insidious design; and, notwithstanding that, he trusted himself in their company. But then he was in no danger of yielding to the temptations they might present to him, or of becoming, in any respect, a victim to their treacherous views. In wisdom, and in virtue, and in power, and in every thing that could qualify him for contending with them, his supe-

riority was infinite. He was perfectly secure, if not against their disposition to misrepresent, or to find fault with him, at least against any real error, in word or in deed, by which they could have lowered his character, and injured his cause. But it is not so with us. Our heart is corrupted and deceitful, and may betray us when we least suspect it. Our enemies may have a degree of cunning which we have not sagacity to detect and to frustrate. Their understandings may be better informed or more acute than ours, and controversy may give them an opportunity of confuting us, though we have truth on our side. Zeal for what is right may warm our temper, and give to their cool deliberate enmity an advantage to which they are not entitled. In short, we may be tempted to hold language, or to commit actions, which may afford them a just or a plausible occasion of subjecting us to a censure, that may be reflected on the religion we profess. And, therefore, convinced of our own weakness, and aware of the mischievous effects produced

by yielding to those who watch us, let us as seldom as possible expose ourselves to the danger. We must never, indeed, shrink from the post that our Master has assigned us. There is no hazard that we must not encounter when it is essential to the station into which he has put us, or to the work which he has given us to do. But while, in these situations, we are to exercise the utmost discretion, united with the utmost firmness, and with prayer to God for his grace to uphold and to preserve us, let us also never, at any time, unnecessarily run the risk of being perplexed by difficulties which we may not be able to unravel, or of being overcome by temptations which may involve ourselves in guilt, and our religion in unmerited obloquy.

The Evangelist tells us, that there was a certain man before Christ, who had the dropsy. Whether this man had introduced himself into the company, in hopes of obtaining a cure, or whether he was introduced there by the Pharisees, for the purpose of ensnaring Christ, does not appear from

any part of the narrative. The latter supposition is the most probable. And if it was really the fact, we see that Christ did not decline the challenge which his enemies thus gave him, but accepted of it at once, and gave them the opportunity of censuring him, which they so anxiously sought. Before proceeding, however to accomplish the cure, he questioned them as to the legality of the action he was about to perform. They knew the compassion which actuated Christ; and no doubt expected that he would display it in the case now before him. They would, of course, be reasoning in their own minds, and privately communing with one another, on the alleged transgression of the law he was on the eve of committing. Perceiving what was thus passing among them, he prefaced his miracle with the enquiry, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?" He asked them, whether, in their opinion, it was a violation of the sanctity of that day to deliver a fellow creature from disease; or whether such an action did not perfectly

correspond with the true spirit and import of the fourth commandment. He asked this question of the Pharisees, who professed great reverence for the Sabbath, and of that portion of them who were doctors of the law, who were supposed to be eminently skilled in the law, and whose office it was to interpret and explain its precepts. We are told, however, that "they held their peace." They refused to give any answer, because they felt it impossible to declare, in so many words, that mercy should not be extended to a human being, on that day which God had mercifully consecrated for the benefit of human beings; but, at the same time, were unwilling to make any admission, which could in the remotest degree exalt the reputation, or countenance the conduct, of a person so obnoxious to them as Jesus Christ.—Let us, my brethren, despise and avoid the meanness of which the lawyers and Pharisees were thus guilty. Let no jealousy of any individual, and no apprehension of injury to a favourite object, ever warp our senti-

ments and opinions. Truth should always be sacred in our regard; and even when it may have the effect of humbling ourselves and elevating our rivals, it becomes us cheerfully to admit, and candidly to acknowledge it, in all its extent. To act otherwise, is neither honourable nor safe—it neither comports with our integrity as men, nor with our principles and our hopes as Christians. In every subject to which our attention can be turned, truth ought to be the object, and the *sole* object of pursuit. And surely, in the concerns of religion and morality, its importance is too vast and too obvious to justify us in rejecting it on any account whatsoever. It is infinitely more worthy of our attachment, than all that the world has to give in its place. Let us be guided by this maxim. And whenever the light of truth has rewarded our enquiries and our prayers, let us open our minds to it immediately and unreservedly, and let it be seen illuminating every part of our deportment. Let us not be ashamed to confess our former er-

rors, or to avow our present convictions. Let us not scruple to discard the systems which we find to be unscriptural, and to renounce the actions which we find to be contrary to the law of God. Let us not disdain to acknowledge the rectitude and superiority of those, whom, in the days of our ignorance, we have been accustomed to pity or despise. And let us not hesitate to sacrifice every degree of intellectual reputation we may have acquired, and every portion of worldly interest we may have accumulated, if it be necessary for our embracing, and loving, and obeying that truth which assimilates us to God, and fits us for immortality.

When the lawyers and Pharisees declined answering the appropriate and reasonable question put to them by Christ, he proceeded to cure the man that had the dropsy. "He took him and healed him, and let him go." Having done this, he again introduced the subject with respect to which he had questioned them, and which he still perceived to be rankling in their minds.

He justified himself by appealing to their own practice. “ He answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day ?” He had put them to silence by his question on the general point. He now adopts a different mode of refutation, and reminds them, that they who professed so much knowledge of the law, and so much zeal for the strict observance of it, would without any scruple encroach on the literal sanctity of the Sabbath, fully more than he had done. *They* would readily shew mercy to a brute animal on the Sabbath-day ; *he* had shewed mercy to one of their own brethren. In the expression of *their* mercy, considerable labour might be necessary ; in the expression of *his*, as they themselves had witnessed, no labour at all was requisite. And it must also have occurred to them, that in the work which *they* did on the Sabbath, there was no proof of any authority to interfere with the sanctity of that day ; whereas, in the work which *he* did, it being a

miraculous work, there was a demonstration that he had come from God, the author of the Sabbath, and the giver of the whole law. Such arguments were irresistible; and therefore, though they had not the candour or the justice to confess that they were wrong, they “could not answer him again to these things.” They had not the effrontery to insist upon their former cavils, to oppose the conclusions to which his questions naturally led, or to denounce him as a breaker of the Sabbath on account of the miraculous cure which he had wrought. Their continued silence was a confession to the piety and lawfulness of *his* conduct, and, at the same time, a decisive symptom of the baseness and incurable enmity of their own hearts.—My friends, while we avoid that Pharisaical observance of the Sabbath, which would make it a day of gloom, and even scruple at works of the most obvious necessity or mercy, let us beware also of whatever would profane it. The prevailing tendency is to this, not to the other, extreme. Against *it*, therefore,

let us be particularly on our guard. “Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.” Let us devote the Sabbath to his service. Let us “keep it holy,” by avoiding every thing inconsistent with its nature and purposes, and by engaging devoutly in all those exercises which are best calculated to secure its sanctity, and to promote the important and benevolent ends of its institution.

Wherever our Saviour was, he took care to inculcate those practical lessons that were suggested by what he observed. In the house of this Pharisee, he observed what he did not approve of, and what it was one great object of his doctrine to point out and condemn. He saw a great deal of pride, and he inculcated humility. He saw a great deal of idle, selfish luxury, and he inculcated charity.

1. He saw a great deal of pride, and he inculcated *humility*. “And he put forth a parable to those that were bidden, when

he marked how they chose out the chief rooms ; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him ; and he that bade thee and him, come and say to thee, Give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher ; then shalt thou have worship (or honour) in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Here our Saviour goes on the supposition of a distinction of rank, from whatever cause it may proceed. He does not in the least degree find fault with such a distinction, as either unjust or improper ; and therefore does not insist on an equality of outward condition and of personal treatment. He takes it for granted, that in *these* respects, some men are entitled to more

honour than others, and that this honour should be paid wherever it is due. But he reproves those who have an excessive anxiety to obtain it, or who presumptuously assume it when it does not belong to them, or who are arrogant, and ostentatious, and overbearing in claiming it, when their claim is well-founded. He maintains that, in all such cases, modesty is the most suitable behaviour, and haughtiness the most unbecoming; and that, by cultivating the former, we are most likely to gain for ourselves that very respect which, by cherishing and exhibiting the latter, we are as likely to forfeit and lose. And, according to his usual mode of instructing, he seems to refer to the inward disposition which should regulate our conduct in the intercourse of society, and to teach us, that the best security for escaping the disappointments which ambitious men frequently meet with, and for receiving and enjoying the preferment which they aim at, but do not attain, is to be clothed at all times with the grace of *humility*. There is in humility—

not that fictitious humility which the hypocrite displays, and which is only a covering for pride—but that true, genuine humility, which naturally flows from a just view of ourselves, and a liberal, indulgent opinion of others ;—there is, in this sort of humility, something so graceful, so amiable, so engaging, that it seldom fails to attract the notice, and secure the honour, which it was only studious to avoid ; and to raise its possessors to that place in the public esteem, which all the efforts of more aspiring men could never reach, or never retain. And it has this advantage, that if those by whom it is exhibited should eventually be treated with neglect and insult, they have not the additional mortification of feeling that this has originated solely in their forwardness and presumption. They are not disappointed in not obtaining what they did not seek, and did not immoderately value. They have the satisfaction of reflecting, that, in human judgment at least, they have deserved to obtain what others have obtained without deserving it ;

and they find a sufficient compensation in the exercise of those virtues, and in the enjoyment of those feelings, which are equally independent of the smiles and the frowns of an unthinking world.

Let us, my friends, remember that our honour, our wisdom, our comfort, and our safety, are all concerned in our being habitually and truly humble. And that we may be qualified for practising humility with effect towards our fellow men, let us practise it constantly towards God. Let us often meditate on our imperfection, and our meanness, and our unworthiness in his sight. Being thus accustomed to lowly views of our heart, and character, and condition; we shall not be so apt to display arrogance and pride, when we mingle in the society of our fellow men, and are placed in situations where there is a struggle for honour and distinction. And let us never forget, that while worldly honours and distinctions are allowable, and may be useful among men, the only true honour is that which cometh from God—the only important dis-

tion is that which consists in being his children. Let us stand in this relation to him "by faith in Jesus Christ," and we occupy a higher station than any to which all the princes of the earth can raise us. We are in the family of the King of kings. We have angels for our attendants. We are approved of by the universal Judge. And there awaits us "a crown of righteousness and glory that fadeth not away."

2. Christ saw a great deal of idle, selfish luxury, and he inculcated *charity*. "Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

It is quite absurd to conclude from this, that our Saviour condemns and prohibits all entertainments which have not for their immediate and sole object the relief of the poor. The circumstances of society, the spirit of Christianity, and the example of Jesus himself, shew, that such a conclusion would be erroneous and unreasonable. His language, indeed, on this occasion is absolute; but it is in reference to the case before him, and, as that case is a striking one, he adopts a mode of speaking frequently employed in Scripture—he speaks in terms of unlimited import and application, when, from the very nature of the thing, their intended meaning is circumscribed. Thus God says, “I will have mercy, and *not* sacrifice”—that is, “I will have mercy, *rather* than sacrifice.” And says our Saviour, in the 26th verse of this very chapter, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple;”—that is, evidently, “he must not literally hate them,

but prefer me and my cause to every one of them, so as actually to forsake them all, if I require it." In like manner, he does not here proscribe and interdict occasional festivals and social intercourse, conducted according to the nature of the occasion, and the rank and circumstances of those who engage in them—but he reprobates all such entertainments given in the spirit and manner which he observed in the case of the Pharisees. He saw them indulging in a magnificence and luxury that were unsuitable to their character and situation. He saw them doing so with the view of having one banquet in return for another, and carrying on a course of extravagant feasting on this mean and selfish principle. And he saw them, amidst all their enjoyments and profuseness, shutting up their bowels of compassion against the children of poverty, and even shamefully neglecting those indigent relations, for whom it was their first duty to provide. Seeing these things, so much fitted to excite his indignation, and so deserving of his reproof, he speaks in

strong language of the conduct which they ought to observe, and lays down a rule for their guidance absolutely expressed, as dictated by strong feelings, and rendered necessary by great abuses, but doubtless liable to those modifications which reason and propriety would suggest.

Although, however, our Saviour only means to inculcate charity, without sternly and relentlessly forbidding the usual modes of social intercourse, he certainly, as in other cases of a similar kind, means to give a decided preference to the former, and to teach, that, in point of duty and importance, the latter should not once be compared with it. If we cannot entertain our rich friends and neighbours without neglecting the poor, we must not entertain at all. Ministering to the gratification of the rich may be innocent enough in itself; but it is no longer innocent—it becomes sinful—when it obliges us to withhold assistance from those whom the Lord has cast upon our bounty. Let us, my friends, act according to the maxim and the precept which Christ has

delivered for the regulation of our conduct. Let us “use the world as not abusing it.” Let us be moderate and frugal in our convivial intercourse. Let us, on these occasions, attend more to the cultivation of social affections, and the mutual improvement of our minds, than to show and luxury, which “perish with the using.” Let us do every thing of this kind, not from obedience to the dictates of fashion, but from motives of real kindness; and let it be conducted under the influence of that spirit which delights in making one another happy. And above all, while we are enjoying the blessings of Providence in abundance and profusion—while we “are clothed, as it were, in purple and fine linen, and are faring sumptuously every day”—let us think of the multitudes that are pining away in nakedness, in sickness, and in want; and let our hearts feel for their misery, and our hands be stretched out for their relief. Let us “give alms to them of such things as we have.” Let us send “portions to them for whom nothing is prepared.” Let us,

according to our ability, make every effort, and support every institution, which promises to supply the wants of the indigent, and to give comfort to the wretched. If we act thus from love to God and the Saviour, to whose unmerited goodness we are indebted for all that we possess, we shall enjoy a satisfaction infinitely superior to that which we can derive from the most fertile sources of worldly and sensual gratification. The recollection of beneficent deeds will enhance the joys of prosperity, and cheer us in the gloom of adversity. It will brighten the day and gild the evening of our earthly course. And as “they who have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life,” then we shall have a recompence indeed—a recompence which shall fill us with ineffable joy, when the luxuries, and gaieties, and gratifications of the world shall have passed into oblivion. For Christ himself, who here teaches us to be charitable, shall say to us at the last day, “Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from

the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

LECTURE XXI.

LUKE XIV. 15—24.

15. *And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.—16. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:—17. And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.—18. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.—19. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.—20. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.—21. So that servant came, and shewed his Lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt; and the blind.—22. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.—23. And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.—24. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

OUR Lord had been discoursing of the spirit and manner in which entertainments should be given. And this probably suggested the observation made by one that

sat at meat with him, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." From what our Saviour said in consequence of this remark it is evident, that "the kingdom of God" here means the Gospel dispensation, and to "eat bread," as we formerly noticed, signifies to make a common meal, and sometimes to partake of a sumptuous feast. So that the person is to be understood as speculating, in terms of admiration, on the happiness of those who should live under the Messiah's reign, and be admitted to the enjoyment of those honours and gratifications which he was expected to bestow upon his people.

The views entertained by this person of the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, it is extremely probable, were very inaccurate and imperfect. But, with the rest of the Jews, he would, of course, cherish the most exalted and magnificent ideas of it as a temporal establishment, and conceive of it as rich in all the pleasures and in all the greatness of this world. His notions he expressed, on the present occasion, under a figure accom-

modated to the situation in which the company was placed, and to the instructions which Christ had been delivering. Even now, there was, in the house of this chief Pharisee, such a degree of splendour and luxury—so much to delight the eye, and minister to the taste—so many sources of that pleasure to which they were most attached—that to partake of his hospitality was to every one of them an object of ambition. But how incalculably was all that they now saw and experienced to be surpassed when *he* came, who was to make them the conquerors of the world, and to give them possession of every object that could contribute to their enjoyment! “Blessed, indeed, would they be who should thus eat bread in the kingdom of God.”

Having these views of the Messiah's reign, the Jews uniformly professed to anticipate its approach with vehement desire, and heartfelt exultation. And in all this they were doubtless sincere. Nothing could be more natural, than that they should be anxious to see realised a system which they had

framed according to their own fancy, and their own wishes, and from which they expected nothing but power, and privilege, and pleasure. But Christ, perceiving the nature and consequences of the mistake under which they laboured on this subject, attempted to undeceive them. In doing so, however, he did not speak to them in plain terms, which would have been more calculated to irritate than to reform. He conveyed his reproofs and his warnings in the form of parable, by which they were just so much disguised as to instruct without offending. To the person who talked with such rapture of the entertainments of the Messiah's kingdom, he delivered a parable of the most striking and appropriate kind; reminding *him*, and all who thought and felt in the same way, that the ideas which they cherished being altogether extravagant and unfounded, their future conduct would not correspond with their present professions. The Messiah would offer to them the blessings of his kingdom; but, not suiting their carnal prejudices and ex-

pectations, they would reject these, and prefer the gratification of their own worldly and sinful passions. And God, in his just displeasure at them on account of their ingratitude and perversity, would withdraw from them the gracious offer that he had made, and transfer it to those who, though hitherto neglected and despised, would gladly accept of it, and treat it with the respect and affection which it claimed.

It is unnecessary to dwell at much length on the original import and application of this parable. The "great supper" obviously means the blessings of the Gospel dispensation. He who made the great supper is God, from whom these blessings proceed. The "many" that were bidden to the feast are the Jews, who were first favoured with the knowledge and the offers of salvation by the Messiah. "Supper time, when all things were ready," was "the fulness of time," when Christ came and "made peace by the blood of his cross." The servant employed to call them that were bidden, may be considered as the Son of God

himself, and his immediate disciples and apostles, by whom the offers of salvation were made to the Jewish people. The excuses returned by those who were bidden, represent the variety and incompetent nature of the objections which the Jews started to justify themselves for rejecting the Gospel. The master of the feast being angry, denotes the displeasure of the Almighty against the Jews, who refused the gracious message that he had sent. By "the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind," who were brought from the streets and lanes of the city, we are to understand the Gentiles, who were called to partake of the privileges of the Gospel, when the Jews, by their obstinacy, shewed themselves unworthy of them. The reply of the servant, "Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room," sets forth, on the one hand, the success with which the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles was attended; and, on the other, the liberality of its spirit, and the richness of its provisions. The last commission which is

given to the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled," gives us a striking view of the condescension, the compassion, the earnestness, with which God communicates the message of salvation, and of the extensive and glorious result that will finally be exhibited of the work of Christ. And in the concluding declaration, "For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper," our Saviour affirms the outcast, hopeless, and miserable state of those to whom mercy has been offered by the Gospel, but who have despised the mercy that would have saved them.

Such is a simple and concise explanation of the parable. We cannot pretend at present to illustrate the various particulars of which it is composed; but you will allow me to direct your attention to the leading views and the more important instructions which it sets before us.

1. In the *first* place, Think of the unspeakable excellence of the Gospel. It pro-

vides you with a spiritual feast—a feast which is calculated to satisfy the purest and the noblest desires of your souls—a feast of which those who sit down to it shall partake for ever, with unsatiated appetite, and ever-growing delight. It feeds the hungry, it refreshes the weary, it comforts the sorrowful, it elevates with joy, and nourishes to everlasting life. Can any thing stronger be said of it, than that it makes every one, who is wise enough to accept of it, happy in life, happy at death, and happy through eternity? And yet all this may be said of it with perfect truth. We cannot think of the goodness of him in whom it has originated, without being satisfied, that its object is in the highest degree beneficent: we cannot think of his wisdom, without being sensible, that it must be admirably adapted to our circumstances and necessities: we cannot think of his power, without perceiving, that it must produce all its gracious effects in the largest possible extent, and with the utmost possible certainty. Indeed, when we

examine its nature and properties—when we consider what it proposes to do, and look at the means by which its blessings are secured and conveyed—we cannot fail to be convinced, that no ideas are too high which can be entertained of its worth and efficacy. And he who has experienced its power and its consolations will tell you that he cannot estimate its value, and that he would not exchange the feelings which it imparts, and the hopes which it inspires,—no, not for the riches of a universe. How, indeed, can it be otherwise; since the Gospel communicates pardon to the guilty, and sanctification to the unholy—supports under trial upon earth, and guides to immortality in heaven?

2. Now, in the *second* place, the blessings of the Gospel are freely offered and affectionately pressed on your reception. That God, who has devised and revealed the Gospel, is no respecter of persons. There is in his regard, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, “neither Jew nor Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free.” To

the rich and the poor, to the old and to the young, to the mighty and to the mean, to them that are afar off, and to them that are nigh, his great salvation is held out as equally necessary, and sufficient, and provided for them all. Even though your demerits have brought you very low in the scale of moral being—though we could justly charge you with being the very chief of sinners—though you should be so degraded as to wonder that the mercy of heaven should be supposed capable of being extended to you—though, in a spiritual sense, you should be, as it were, poor and maimed, and halt and blind, cast out into the streets and lanes of the city, or wandering about the highways and hedges of the field—though this be your situation, you are not to deem yourselves excluded from the grace or from the glory of the Gospel. “Come unto me,” says Christ, with unbounded and unparalleled kindness, “come unto me *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “The Spirit and the Bride say, come; and let

him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely." In the offer of salvation which the Gospel gives you, there is nothing of reluctance or illiberality. The contrary of this is manifested by the very nature of the Gospel scheme, and by all the declarations of the Gospel record. "God so loved you, as to give his only begotten Son, that ye might live through him;" and, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to the death for you all, how shall he not with him also freely give you all things?" Nay, but the blessings of the Gospel are not only freely offered to all who will accept of them;—you are invited and urged in the most affectionate terms to embrace the offer. The servants of the Lord—the ministers of the Gospel—are commissioned to "compel you," as it were, "to come in." We are furnished, for that purpose, with arguments and motives the most powerful and affecting. We constrain you by the love of Christ; we beseech you by the mercies of God; we persuade you

by the terrors of the Lord; we appeal to your gratitude, your duty, and your interest; we address ourselves to your hopes and your fears; we endeavour to fire your ambition by pointing to the crown of glory; and sometimes we lift up the voice of terror, that those may be alarmed by judgment whom mercy cannot allure. Many are the ways we employ in presenting to you the blessings of the Gospel; but they are all expressive of the compassion of God, and they have all but one object—to prevail upon sinners to believe and live. And is it possible, my friends, that any one of you should know any thing of sin and its consequences on the one hand, and of the Gospel and its salvation on the other,—is it possible for any one of you to listen to all the kind invitations—the affectionate intreaties—the pressing expostulations and remonstrances that have been addressed to you by the Saviour and his servants—and yet to remain callous and indifferent? to continue at a distance from God, to persevere in sin, and mock at “the vengeance of

eternal fire?" Alas! one could scarcely believe it possible, did not daily experience demonstrate the fact to a melancholy and dreadful extent. O! that I could persuade myself on good grounds, that every individual now hearing me either had already embraced, or were now willing to embrace, the salvation of the Gospel! What a subject for congratulation! What a theme of gratitude and praise! What a trophy to the cross of Jesus! What joy to the church on earth! What triumph to the inhabitants of heaven!—But, ah! it is to be feared that this delightful speculation must give place to the sad reality, that there are some who neither feel their need of the Gospel, nor will give themselves any trouble to become acquainted with its nature and necessity—some on whom it has been frequently, strongly, and affectionately urged, but who begin immediately to make some excuse, and end with giving the preference in their attachments to every thing else, however trifling, and however base.

3. To all such I must state, in the *third*

place, that their excuses for rejecting the Gospel are utterly insufficient and unjustifiable. It is of no consequence what these excuses are; they must, of necessity, be groundless and inadmissible. If you reject the Gospel, because you wish to indulge in sin—because it requires you to renounce vices that you love, and to perform duties that you hate—because, in short, your acceptance of it is inconsistent with certain criminal pursuits and pleasures in which you are engaged, and cannot consent to abandon—such a plea amounts to nothing less than this, that you will not be *reconciled* to God, because you prefer to be in *rebellion* against him. But there is no occasion for putting such a strong case. The language of the parable supposes, that the apologies preferred arise from engagements which in themselves, so far from being unworthy, are lawful and proper. But even these cannot be sustained. They cannot justify those who offer them. For they imply, that something is preferred to the grace and the will of God; and such a pre-

ference is equally foolish and sinful. If the Gospel is, indeed, a revelation of divine mercy, there is nothing in this world to be compared with it. If we lose what it bestows, we lose our own souls; and what are we profited then though we gain the whole world? Besides, by rejecting the Gospel that we may attend more closely to the business of this mortal life, and accumulate honours, and riches, and attainments, that may take to themselves wings and flee away, we at once oppose the authority of God who commands us to believe, and despise his grace which bringeth salvation. Indeed, every excuse that can be conceived for refusing the message that comes to us from heaven must be completely futile, and not only so, but insulting to that Almighty Being who sends it—otherwise, there is no truth, no importance, no authority in the religion of Christ. Let this consideration weigh deeply with those who are in the habit of neglecting the concerns of religion—who think little of the things that belong to their eternal peace—

who sacrifice the care of their souls to the pursuit of their secular interests, and never attend to the former so long as the latter are capable of being promoted and aggrandised. The business of this world, and preparation for the next, are by no means incompatible. God has made both worlds. He has established the connection that subsists between them. And he is too wise and too good to render what is essential to well-being in the one, inconsistent with what is essential to well-being in the other. Such an inconsistency is created by the avarice and covetousness of men, who, far from being "content with such things as they have," scruple not to forget God—to forsake his worship—to violate his Sabbaths—to serve the creature more than the Creator—that they may hoard up a little more, and yet a little more, of the "gold that perisheth." Let not such a preference of mammon to God be once named or once exhibited among you. Attend to the one thing needful. "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteous-

ness, and all other things will be added to you," in proper time, and in proper measure.—To determine you to this conduct,

4. Consider, in the *fourth* place, the danger and misery of those who reject the offer of salvation. "The master of the house was angry," and his indignation expressed itself in this threatening, "For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." God is "angry with the wicked every day." Every one sin they commit is offensive to his holy eye, and is marked for punishment in his book of remembrance. But, most of all, *that* sin must excite his displeasure, which consists in treating his saving mercy with indifference and contempt. In the Gospel, he has made all the glory of his character to pass before us. And to despise the Gospel which is thus distinguished, is insulting to every divine perfection which it so eminently unfolds. It is the highest degree of disobedience, combined with the highest degree of ingratitude, that can be shewn to the Governor of the world. It is to arraign

his wisdom, to trample on his goodness, to question his truth, and to set all the majesty of his power at defiance. It is the deepest shade of criminality which can darken and degrade the sinner's conduct; and, consequently, that which must provoke the Almighty to pour out upon him all the vials of his wrath. Think not, ye who are guilty of turning a deaf ear to the calls of the Gospel, do not flatter yourselves that it is possible for you to obtain forgiveness, or to avoid the wrath to come, if you persevere in such culpable and hardened obstinacy. Doubtless you will sometimes stop in your career of guilt, and dream, for your comfort, that after all you may be safe—that you shall not fall into the perdition of ungodly men—that though you live the life of the wicked, you shall die the death of the righteous, and that your latter end shall be like his. Unhappy delusion! Miserable sinners! thus to hope for mercy while you are in the very act of despising and refusing it!—thus to think of entering into heaven, while, with your eyes open,

you are descending fast into the chambers of destruction ! There is but one way of deliverance revealed by him from whom alone deliverance can come ; and, therefore, if you will not walk in that way, deliverance can never come to you. “ Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid—the Lord Jesus Christ.” If, then, you do not build on this foundation, your hopes of safety are vain, and must ultimately perish. The very freeness and fulness of the salvation of the Gospel—the very wonders of that mercy which it displays—*secure* the punishment of those by whom it is rejected. “ If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received its just recompence of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? ” Settle it, therefore, in your minds, brethren ;—and, O ! that every impenitent sinner in this assembly would reflect upon it with seriousness and self-application—settle it in your minds, that, unless you believe and obey the Gospel, you cannot be saved, and you cannot

be happy. "None of those men which were bidden, and refused the invitation, shall taste of my supper." If you reject the Gospel, you perish of course. It is designed to rescue your souls from sin and misery; and if you do not avail yourselves of the offer, in that sin and in that misery you must, by necessary consequence, be eternally involved. This, too, is the *divine decree*—the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it—"Ye shall not enter into my rest." And have you ever considered *what it is* to be excluded from the blessings of the Gospel? It is to remain under the curse of the divine law. It is to continue subject to the dominion and yoke of sin. It is to live without God, and to die without hope. It is to be shut out from the blessedness and glory of the celestial world. It is to "lie down in everlasting burnings." And it is, in the midst of all this punishment, to have the bitter and aggravated pain of recollecting, that the kingdom of heaven, that the crown of immortality was held out to you, but that you madly renounced it for the

pleasures of a moment. Be wise, then; “now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Listen to the voice of God to-day, and harden not your hearts.” The door of mercy is still open. The Gospel still spreads out its feast before you. And we still invite, and exhort, and beseech you to come in and partake of it. Do this, and your souls shall live. If ye refuse, they must perish, and that for ever.

5. In the *fifth* and *last* place, We are here called to contemplate the final result of the Gospel. When we look around us in the world, and observe how many there are who, either by infidel principles or unholy practice, are rejecting its invitations and making themselves “vessels of wrath fitted for destruction,” a melancholy thought is apt to steal upon our minds, that, after all, the Gospel will have, comparatively speaking, but few triumphs, and that the heavenly country will be but thinly peopled. No doubt there is much reason to lament the multitudes that, in spite of every effort to enlighten and reclaim them, live and die

impenitent. But while this must fill us with deep regret, and should inflame our zeal in doing good to men's souls, let us not over-rate the fact, sufficiently dismal in any degree, and in every aspect. We see many who *have* known the truth, and whom the truth has made free. We have reason, also, to believe, that there are many such around us whom we have never seen; whom obscurity, or poverty, or diffidence, has concealed from our observation. We have reason to believe, that there are some among us of whose spiritual condition, "judging according to appearances," we may have "judged unrighteous judgment." And at any rate, whatever we may have known or not known, of this we are assured, that Christ, the Saviour, has seen of the travail of his soul and been satisfied. We cannot suppose, that the Son of God became incarnate, and suffered, and died, without an adequate result of his humiliation, and his sorrow. The scheme of an infinitely wise and powerful Being, for the recovery of a lost world, must be successful in bringing

many sons and daughters unto glory. "The unbelief of man shall not make the promise of God of none effect." Christ has told us, that in his Father's house are many mansions, and that he has gone to prepare them. But numerous though those mansions be, they shall be filled with those for whom they are prepared. Great, indeed, is the natural ignorance, and deep is the natural corruption, of man; but the grace of God is omnipotent to enlighten, to sanctify, and to save. In that we have a pledge, the most unequivocal and secure, that finally incalculable myriads of the children of men shall rejoice before the throne of God. The prospect is refreshing—it is exalted—it is glorious! Let it be our most anxious concern to be found at last among the happy number. And let us labour to contribute to its increase, by spreading the knowledge of the Gospel, and thus multiplying those who shall join the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, that say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to re-

ceive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen."

LECTURE XXII.

MATT. VI. 1—18.

1. *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them ; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.—2. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.—3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth :—4. That thine alms may be in secret : and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.—5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.—6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.—7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do : for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.—8. Be not ye therefore like unto them : for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.—9. After this manner therefore pray ye : Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name :—10. Thy kingdom come : thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven :—11. Give us this day our daily bread :—12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors .—13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil : for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.*

Amen.—14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you :—15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.—16. Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.—17. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face ;—18. That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

THERE is good reason for believing, that the original word in the first verse, which is translated *alms*, should have been a word which signifies *righteousness* in general. This idea has a sufficient foundation in the authority of several copies and ancient versions. And while, on that account, we are fully warranted in adopting it, it deserves the preference, because it avoids a tautology, or useless repetition of the same sentiment. As it stands in our common translation, the identical precept is delivered in the second verse, that had been given in the first. But by making the alteration just now suggested, our Saviour is represented as introducing his subject with a general, comprehensive statement,

respecting the motive to good conduct, and then applying it to certain specified branches of duty, namely, *almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.*

“ Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”

Vain glory was the ruling passion of the Scribes and Pharisees. If they abstained from any course of action, it was to escape the censure of their fellow men; and if they pursued an opposite course, it was to obtain their approbation. They were completely satisfied, if what they did increased or preserved their public reputation, however profligate it might be in itself, and however contrary to the divine law. Accordingly, we find our Saviour often accusing them of such unworthy views, reprobating these with great severity, and pointing out the danger of allowing them to actuate the deportment.

But these views were not peculiar to the Scribes and Pharisees;—we fear that they

are a great deal too prevalent among ourselves. With many, it is obvious that their influence is paramount, systematic, and exclusive; and even among those who are sensible of the impropriety of yielding to them, and are desirous of being guided by higher considerations, they are frequently permitted to exercise a degree of power that is not at all consistent with moral excellence. And this is not much to be wondered at, when we think of the little attention that is paid to a subject so important, in the practical instruction of the young. How often do we hear abstinence from certain indulgences, and the performance of certain duties, inculcated upon children from a mere regard to the opinions that will be entertained of them by their friends or by the world! The lesson thus impressed upon them in early life, continues to operate as they advance in years, gradually acquires a settled dominion over their minds, and at length becomes a fixed and ruling principle of conduct, whose authority they think as little of disputing, as

a good man thinks of disputing the authority of God. At every step they take, their only anxiety is about the appearance they shall exhibit to others ;—their enquiry is not, are we acting agreeably to the will of heaven, and so as to please that great Being by whom we are governed, and to whom we are responsible ?—No ;—their enquiry is, what will our acquaintance think ? what will our fellow citizens say of us ? how are we to manage, so as to avoid their displeasure, and to command their applause ? Having satisfied themselves on this point, they look no farther ; and consequently are good or bad, just as the erring standard to which they apply may happen to direct them.

Now, my friends, if there be any of you of whom this is in a greater or a less degree characteristic, let me remind you of the precept of Christ,—“ Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them.” “ Take heed”—be extremely cautious—guard against it with the utmost care, not only because you are in

great danger of falling into the error of which you are thus warned, but also because it is an error of the most fatal and pernicious kind. If, in the course of your religious and moral practice, your principal or sole object be to attract the notice, the admiration, and the applause of men, you must fall short of that reward which God has promised to them that obey him ;—it would be inconsistent with his holy perfections to bestow it upon you ;—you are not qualified to receive and to enjoy it. That you may be convinced of this, reflect for a little on the demerits of that conduct which would thus exclude you from the recompense annexed to obedience.

1. In the *first* place, such conduct implies a preference of the creature to the Creator.—It implies, that we are more anxious to please men than to please God—that we are more afraid of human censure, than we are of divine indignation—that we deem it more honourable, more dutiful, more safe, to conform our character to the

wishes and judgment of creatures like ourselves, than to conform it to the requisition of Him who is infinite in perfection, and who ruleth over all. And such an indignity offered to the Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth, must deprive the righteousness, to which we pretend, of its essential value, and render it altogether unacceptable and vain. It can have no reward of our Father in heaven.

2. In the *second* place, such conduct involves in it a rejection of that standard of duty which we have received from God, and the substitution of one that is not warranted by his sanction.—Every action that is required of us, is required to be done from certain motives, which are as authoritatively appointed, and as absolutely necessary, as the action itself. The two must be combined, in order to produce the conduct which it is incumbent on us to maintain. If the action which is commanded be not influenced by the motives which are prescribed, the law, from which both ema-

nate, has not been obeyed, and we have not done what can in any respect, or in any measure, render us truly good. But the mere love of human applause, does not constitute one of the motives to whose influence we are enjoined to submit; on the contrary, it is inconsistent with these motives—it is subversive of them. It is recognising a principle of action, to which the great Ruler and Judge of the world has given no countenance, and of which it is utterly impossible for him to approve; because it gives to his creatures that authority which inalienably belongs to *Him*. Whatever we do, therefore, on this principle, is not done to God—it has no connection with the moral system which he has dictated; and, consequently, so far from warranting us to expect that he will bestow any reward upon us, it must expose us to the punishment with which he will visit every instance of deliberate rebellion.

3. In the *third* place, such conduct almost necessarily leads to the frequent com-

mission of sin.—When we act merely to be seen of men—when we have scarcely another object than to consult their opinions, and to obtain their favour—we put ourselves under the direction of an imperfect and corrupted guide. The world, by whose smile we are encouraged, or by whose frown we are awed, has not the most accurate conceptions of godliness and virtue—does not always condemn what is bad, and praise what is good, but often confers honour on deeds that are vicious and criminal, and subjects the sincerest piety to ridicule and reproach. Erring in its judgments, licentious in many of its principles, and wavering and capricious in its views of moral conduct, though it may sometimes lead you right, it must frequently lead you wrong. And therefore, deliberately to follow its decisions, to shrink from every thing of which it would disapprove, and to indulge in every thing which it permits and applauds, is deliberately to adopt a system, if system it can be called, by which we are certain of being betrayed into delin-

quency and guilt. A reward from the just and holy God is, in that case, entirely out of the question.

4. We have still to add, in the *fourth* place, that if we act righteously, or perform our duties merely to be seen of men, we shall be in imminent, inevitable danger of becoming consummate hypocrites.—It is not to be supposed that we will care for any thing which does not at the time, or may not afterwards, come under the observation of others. Our attention will be directed solely to what they have had an opportunity of seeing or knowing. To every thing else we will, of course, be utterly indifferent. Now, even though our fellow creatures should approve of nothing but what was excellent—a supposition which is by no means realised—still, in all that large portion of our personal character which escapes their notice, we should feel ourselves at liberty to follow our own inclinations, if we had no other check than what was imposed by a regard to their opinion.

That is to say, we should be regardless of the state of our hearts, and, because no human eye could discern their thoughts and intents, allow them to be the undisturbed and polluted seat of vain imaginations, of carnal affections, of malicious feelings, of unholy purposes. Whenever we could flatter ourselves with the hope of avoiding detection, our passions and appetites, freed from the only restraint to which they had been accustomed to submit, would yield to every temptation that occurred, and gratify themselves without measure and without remorse. And even those very actions which we performed, in order to acquire or uphold a reputation in the world, would be destitute of the most essential quality of righteousness; for, having succeeded in giving them all the appearance of virtue and worth, and thus gained the only object we had in view, we should be at no pains to act from those pure and upright motives to which they would have been indebted for all their excellence. But God, seeing us clothed with the garment of hy-

pocrisy—beholding our hearts unclean and wicked—observing us indulging ourselves unreservedly in every secret sin—perceiving, under the veil of our seeming virtues, a total want of those principles which are necessary to give them real substance and value—God will not, cannot reward a conduct so destitute of all that he requires, and so degraded by all that he has declared himself to hate, and pledged himself to punish.

“ Take heed, therefore, that ye practise not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.” This precept, indeed, does not forbid you to be holy in the eye of the world—it does not command you to be industrious in concealing your good deeds from public observation. No; that would seem to indicate, that you were ashamed of what should be your most honourable distinction—conformity to the divine will. It would deprive all who are within the sphere of your influence of the benefit that must naturally

result to them from your good example. It would counteract the progress of practical religion, and consequently detract from the glory of God, both of which are objects that every Christian is bound to promote. And it would be inconsistent with the maxims of Scripture, which compares you to “a city set upon a hill, that cannot be hid”—tells you to “provide things honest in the sight of all men”—and exhorts you to “let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.” It is not only lawful, but a point of duty, to be righteous outwardly and openly, and sometimes intentionally to press your virtuous deeds on the attention of others. Whatever you do, however, in this way, must be done from right principles, and for a worthy end. If it be nothing more than an ostentatious display, intended to excite the public admiration, and to secure to yourselves the praise of men; if your views and purposes, in practising holiness, terminate in the spread and exaltation of your

own fame, then is that holiness empty and vain—it is a shadow without the substance—it has no respect to the will of God—it cannot therefore meet with his approbation, or be crowned with the reward which he has promised to a willing and obedient people.

“Therefore, when thou doest thine alms,” says Christ, “do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do, in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly.”

The Scribes and Pharisees gave their alms in the most public manner; they gave them “in the synagogues and in the streets”—in the most crowded places, where they were sure of being observed by the people at large, or by those whose favour they were anxious to possess. They reserved

their charities for these situations—giving nothing in private, and giving much in public. And while they did all this with so much ostentation and noise, that they might be said to “sound a trumpet before them,” in order to call the attention of the multitude to their benevolence, they did it from no desire either to be useful to the objects whom they relieved, or to incite the spectators to “go and do likewise,” but solely with a view to obtain “glory of men,” to be superior to others in the work of almsgiving, and to acquire the name and the praise of being liberal to the poor.

We must beware of imitating this conduct. For though it may gratify feelings that are very natural to us, it is both improper in itself, and fruitless in its consequences. We may succeed in attaining the object of our pursuit; but what real or permanent advantage is to be derived from that success, even in its utmost extent? What is the praise of men, if it be not accompanied with the approbation of our own

minds, and if it be incompatible with the approbation of our God and Father in heaven? What reason have we to depend upon its continuance, since it is a tribute to hypocrisy, which may some time or other lose its mask, and since it proceeds from creatures so fluctuating and capricious, who may withdraw without injustice, what they have bestowed without reason? What does it avail us, that mortals like ourselves are admiring us for virtues that we never possessed, when the Judge of all is pronouncing upon us a sentence of condemnation for the want of those very virtues which have raised us so high in human esteem? And will it be any consolation for us, amidst that punishment to which our guilt, and dissimulation, and impenitence, shall for ever subject us, to know that the beings on whom we imposed by the semblance of charity, are blessing our memory, and that our name has gone into distant lands, and descended to the latest posterity with honour? Ah! my friends, the period is coming, when even this reward shall cease;

when it shall not be recollected, that we ever gave a mite to the poor—when our name, and our place, and our deeds, shall be forgotten—when the loftiest monuments of human benevolence, and the proudest records of human glory, shall be lost in the conflagration of a perishing world—and when, standing before the tribunal of heaven, our everlasting condition will be determined, not by the righteousness we have assumed, but by the righteousness we have possessed—not by the alms we have given, but by the spirit and views with which we gave them—not by the opinions which fallible men entertained of us, but by the judgment of that Being who “searches the heart,” and will not allow that “glory to be given to another, which is due to him alone.”

Let it be our study, therefore, to approve ourselves to God, and to seek the honour which cometh from above. In almsgiving, let us rather be reserved, than ostentatious. Let us give openly, when called to do so in the course of Providence; and

let us not be deterred, in such cases, from the exercise of public charity, by the mere apprehension of being deemed vain-glorious. But let us never be stimulated or influenced by a *desire* to be seen of men, and to have glory of them. Let it be our sole object to act agreeably to the divine will. Let us practise benevolence as if God were our only witness ; and let us practise it under the impressions of our future responsibility to him. And then, though a large proportion of it must escape the observation of the world ; though it should not attract the notice, nor obtain the applause of a single individual ; though it should be so little known as to awaken a suspicion that we have it not ; though our alms be so secret, that, proverbially speaking, our “ left hand does not know what our right has done ;” though they should have had so little of the striking or the selfish in them, as not merely to have been unremarked by others, but to be almost, or altogether, forgotten by ourselves ;—still the ever-watchful eye of Omniscience has beheld them :

God has a book of remembrance in which the smallest and most secret of them are faithfully recorded ; and, at last, being “ not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love,” he will “ reward us openly ;” he will acknowledge our deeds of mercy and kindness to our poor brethren in the presence of assembled myriads—and he will give us our “ inheritance among the saints in light.”

“ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet ; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

The Scribes and Pharisees were hypocritical in their devotions, as well as in their charity. They were not satisfied with exhibiting their piety before men, in the ex-

ercises of social prayer and public worship ; they went to the most frequented places of the city ; and there, in the gaze of the multitude, and amidst the bustle of business or amusement, were seen offering up their private and individual prayers. And they did so, not because they felt any desire to make a sincere and acceptable approach to God, but because they were anxious to have the name of being attentive to that duty, and to stand high in public estimation. “ Verily they had their reward.” Good and wise men would of course despise them. The simple, however, and the credulous, and the thoughtless, might give them credit for principles and feelings which they were not conscious of possessing, and sound their praises for a character which had not one particle of real worth to recommend it ; but this paltry and ignoble recompense died with their bodies, and left their prayerless souls to “ fall into the hands of the living God,” with whom no imposition can succeed, to whom “ the sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination,” and

who has declared, by the mouth of his Son, that they who “ make prayers for a pretence” shall “ receive the greater punishment.”

In devotion, as in almsgiving, let us avoid every approach to ostentation. Let us recollect, that every degree of unnecessary display in the duties of devotion, is inconsistent with its nature, and hostile to its growth and influence. Prayer is the communion of the soul with God. And though, both in public and in private, certain outward forms may be expedient, as well as natural; yet, whenever these are permitted to withdraw our attention from what is essential, and to interrupt the intercourse which we are supposed to be maintaining with the Father of our spirits, they are to be discarded as injurious and unlawful. Much more does it become us to avoid those considerations, and those acts, which fix the mind of the worshipper on any other object than him to whom his homage is addressed; which make him think of reputation among men, rather

than of acceptance with God ; which render him more anxious to convince others that he is pious, than to feel, in his own consciousness, that he has the spirit of prayer and supplication ; and which contribute to cherish the delusive and grovelling idea, that his piety is sufficiently elevated though it never reach to heaven, and sufficiently gainful though it does not procure for him one spiritual blessing that he needs. When we pray individually, let us for that purpose retire from the world ; let us, as much as possible, seclude ourselves from the presence of others who might suspect us, or misrepresent us, or interrupt us ; and thus sequestered from society, and guarded from intrusion, let us pour out our hearts before Him who is the hearer and the answerer of prayer,—encouraged by the assurance, that no desire, however secretly conceived—no petition, however faintly expressed—no feeling of adoration, however profoundly concealed, shall escape his favourable regard ; and that, when “ the judgment is set and the books are opened,”

we shall find his promise of reward to be
“ yea and amen in Jesus Christ.”

Having introduced the subject of prayer, our Saviour makes a digression, in order to inculcate upon his hearers some important and useful lessons with respect to the performance of that duty. Reserving these for future consideration, we shall pass on to the third point by which he illustrates his general precept respecting the practice of righteousness.

“ Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face; that thou appear, not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

The Scribes and Pharisees were remarkable for their spiritual pride. They had no convictions of guilt, and no lowliness of mind. They boasted of their superio-

city to others, congratulated themselves on their attainments, and, on the ground of their own merits, looked up with unblushing confidence to God for the acceptance of their services and their persons. Notwithstanding this, however, they deemed it expedient to fast; and they even went so far in this religious solemnity, as to "fast twice in the week." And, on these occasions, they assumed every appearance of sorrow and dejection—put on a sad countenance—covered their heads with dust and ashes—and disfigured their faces with all the most significant tokens of deep mental anguish. They felt, indeed, no mental anguish; but they "appeared unto men to fast;" and they wished for nothing more, by this machinery of mourning, than the reputation and praise of a humility to which their hearts were utter strangers. "Verily they had their reward." Although the profligacy with which they belied these flaming professions must have exposed them to a great deal of contempt and indignation, yet they no doubt succeeded in im-

posing upon many, and obtained a large portion of that commendation and respect which are usually paid to the virtues they had assumed. But in this consisted all the recompense they could look for. Not having mourned in sincerity, they could never know what it was to be comforted of God. From him they could receive no blessing while they lived, “for he resisteth the proud.” And when they died, their hope, being that of the hypocrite, perished, and gave place to the dread realities of that despair and misery which those must suffer who live ungodly, and die impenitent.

My friends, be not like the Scribes and Pharisees. When ye fast, be at no pains to wear the aspect of extraordinary distress. Do not rest satisfied with bodily mortifications, or please yourselves with going through all the outward forms of such a service. Avoid, as much as possible, this mere show and ceremony. “Anoint your head, and wash your face.” Preserve your usual manner, and conform to your usual

customs. And let your chief attention be directed to the frame and temper of your minds. Let your souls be afflicted with the recollections of guilt, and humbled under a sense of your unworthiness in the sight of God. Remember that God's eye is upon your heart. Let that be filled with contrition, and abasement, and sorrow, and penitence, on account of the sins that have marked your conduct, and the depravity that pervades your nature. Remember that his "ear is ever open to your cry." Make your confessions to him in secret, and supplicate from him mercy to pardon your offences, and grace to sanctify and to help you. Remember that he has promised to "look to him that is of a contrite spirit, and trembles at his word." "Humble yourselves, therefore, and he will exalt you in due time." "Sow in the tears" of godly sorrow, and you shall "reap in the joys" of heavenly happiness. "Repent, and be converted, and your sins shall be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Live with the eye of your faith habitually fixed on the cross of Christ ; that, by the contemplation of his sufferings there, you may feel more sorrow, and more humility on account of sin—that you may be more consoled with the sense of pardoning mercy—that you may be more encouraged to return to the ways of God's commandments—and that you may be more animated to walk in them by the hope of future glory, which the belief of a once crucified, but now exalted Redeemer is alone calculated to inspire.

LECTURE XXIII.

MATTH. vi. 9—15.

9. *After this manner, therefore, pray ye : Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name :—10. Thy kingdom come : thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven :—11. Give us this day our daily bread :—12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors :—13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil : for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.—14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you :—15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

AFTER giving a general precept respecting the motives from which we ought to practise righteousness, our Saviour proceeds to apply it to the particular duties of *alms-giving, prayer, and fasting*. When speaking on the subject of prayer, he goes beyond the immediate purpose for which he had introduced it. He takes occasion to guard his disciples against certain errors of a different description, which mar the propriety, and waste the spirit of devotion ;

and points out to them, in a prescribed form, the mode in which it became them to address the Supreme Being.

This form of prayer has been considered by many as intended, by its Author, to be of universal and permanent obligation; and those who have not adopted and employed it in that view have been censured as inattentive to an ordinance of divine institution.

It is certainly a matter of serious moment to be accused of disobedience to the injunction of Christ. The charge is important as brought against individuals; it is of more importance still as brought against the church at large to which we belong; and it is most important of all, when we recollect the allegation with which it is accompanied, namely, that we act in defiance of a plain and positive declaration of Scripture. If this charge be true, then must we plead guilty of a fault by no means inconsiderable, and the sooner we reform our practice the better. But if it shall prove to be unfounded, we may take

comfort to ourselves though the accusation be persisted in; and shall feel it our duty to persevere in the opinion we have hitherto entertained, and in the course we have hitherto pursued.

The position we maintain is this, that the form of prayer which our Saviour gave to his disciples was never meant to be binding, as a part of Christian worship, on succeeding ages of the church; and, consequently, that though, in the way of accommodation, as we shall afterwards see, it may be both lawfully and properly made use of, we are justified in not making use of it according to the sense which it literally and originally bears, and according to the method in which it is usually employed by those who hold a contrary opinion.

1. In the *first* place, If our Saviour meant this form to be of strict and permanent obligation, it is rather an unaccountable circumstance, that no farther notice should be taken of it after the regular institution of the Christian church.—In the Acts of the

Apostles, we find these holy men engaging repeatedly in prayer, but it is never stated, nor even insinuated, that this form was observed. In the Epistles, too, though precepts and instructions are frequently given with respect to the general duty, the Lord's prayer is nowhere recognised or enjoined. And for some centuries after the apostolic age, it does not appear, from any authentic document that has come down to us, that it ever constituted a part either of public or of private worship.

We are aware that these facts do not amount to a conclusive argument, but they certainly afford presumptive evidence. For it must be accounted extremely improbable, that, in the circumstances of the case, not the slightest intimation should have been given of compliance with so distinct and so important an injunction, if such compliance had been understood as indispensable in all the followers of Christ; and that it should have been so completely omitted and unnoticed by the very persons who were best qualified to comprehend its

import, and who were employed to communicate their Master's will to the rest of mankind.

2. In the *second* place, The express reasons for which Christ prescribed this form are not such as to warrant the inference, that it is binding upon *us*.—He told his hearers, that they were not to imitate the example of the heathens, whose prayers were full of “vain repetitions,” and who thought that they would be “heard for their much speaking.” He told them, that God's previous acquaintance with their wants, and his intimate perception of their secret and sincere desires, rendered the prolixity of which he spoke both unnecessary and indecorous. And the prayer which he gave them is to be regarded as a specimen of the brevity and conciseness which they were to observe in addressing their heavenly Father—more especially as he introduced it with saying—not, Ye are to pray in these precise words—but, “After this manner, therefore, pray ye.” If language

has any meaning, this language bears most evidently, that it is to be used, not as a stinted form, but as a general directory on the particular point which our Saviour was discussing when he prescribed it.

But, then, we are referred to another part of the Gospels, where our Saviour's language is different, and thought to impose a strict and definite obligation. In the eleventh chapter of the Gospel by Luke, second verse, he is represented as having said to his disciples, "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven," &c. Here, it is maintained, the injunction is peremptory and indisputable. A little explanation, however, will shew the inconclusiveness of this argument.

It is rather a curious fact, that those whose opinion we are combating, make use, not of the form which is introduced with these words, "When ye pray, say," but of that which is introduced with the words, "*After this manner*, therefore, pray ye." And the one they actually use is in several points different from the one which,

in strict propriety, they ought to use. "Give us this day our daily bread," says the former; "Give us day by day our daily bread," says the latter. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," says the former; "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us," says the latter. These differences, it must be confessed, are not important; but certainly if there be a difference at all, the *express form* cannot be given up for the *mere directory*, without departing from the idea that our Saviour intended his language to be strictly understood, and to be binding on Christians of every age. But the greatest difference of all between the two remains to be mentioned. The Lord's Prayer as given by Matthew, which, as we have already shewn, is nothing but a *directory*, has the doxology at its conclusion; while the Lord's Prayer as given by Luke, which is alleged to be peremptorily enjoined, has not the doxology, "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen." From this it may be inferred at

least, that our Christian brethren, who differ from us on this point, are not true to their own doctrine; and that they cannot consistently censure us for a latitude of interpretation in which they themselves have practically indulged.

But we would not rest our defence on their inconsistency. The truth of the matter is, that if we attend to the passage in Luke we shall find, that the prayer which it contains is no more obligatory as a set form, than the one which the passage before us contains. "One of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." It was customary among the Jewish masters to give to their pupils, or disciples, a short form of prayer, as a sort of badge, or symbol, of the relation in which they stood to him. This custom John had adopted, and Christ conformed to it at the request of one of his disciples. But this was done in mere condescension to their harmless prejudices. It was, from the very nature of the case, as well as from the terms employed, confined to his immediate

followers; and even if they had understood his injunction in that rigid sense which has since been attached to it, "when they prayed," they would have said just what he had prescribed, and nothing else. But, in truth, while he gratified them by conferring upon them the same distinction which was enjoyed by the disciples of the Baptist, he also took the opportunity of "teaching them to pray," with a different view. He referred immediately to the directory of prayer which he had given in his sermon on the mount, and by means of which he inculcated conciseness in devotional exercises; and, besides this, he inculcates another quality of devotion, suggested by the argument made use of to induce him to teach his disciples to pray. The Jewish teachers, in the forms which they prescribed, confined themselves almost entirely to *adoration*, which was good and becoming in its own place, but not good or becoming to the exclusion of other pious sentiments. Our Lord, therefore, to correct this error, teaches his disciples to address their hea-

venly Father in the way of *petition* also, and to supplicate from him those blessings which were necessary for themselves, and for their fellow-creatures. And that this was his leading object here is evident, not only from the fact just now mentioned, but also from the succeeding context. Omitting the doxology, or ascription of praise and glory to God, he hastens on, as it were, to amplify and enforce the lesson which he had found it expedient to inculcate, and of which he had given a specific example; and both by a beautiful illustration and an earnest precept, to recommend the duty of asking from God that we may receive according to our need.

3. In the *third* place, It is worthy of observation, that the source from which the several parts of this prayer are taken, renders the supposition very improbable, that Christ intended it for permanent use, exactly as it stands.—With the exception of that part of the petition respecting forgiveness, which says, “as we forgive them that

trespass against us," the whole of it is extracted from the liturgies that were in use among the Jews.* Now the sentiments and language of these liturgies were, of course, accommodated to the dispensation under which the Jews lived. But that dispensation was different from the one under which we are placed—so different, that the former was only a preparation for the latter. It cannot, therefore, be supposed, that the petitions which were suitable to the one, should be altogether suitable to the other; or that Christ, acting as the head of the church which bears his name, and which shall continue till the end of all things, should prescribe a form of worship borrowed from a church, all whose peculiarities were to cease whenever his own was established in the world. Had he designed this prayer for us, who live in the sunshine of the Gospel, we have every rea-

* It is not meant by this that the Jewish church had liturgies by divine institution; but that, in point of fact, liturgies were in use, seems to be undeniable.

son to believe, that he would have introduced into it petitions most directly and distinctly applicable to the characteristic doctrines of Christianity, and not limited himself to a phraseology adapted to the darker and more imperfect scheme of Judaism. The truth is, that Christ and his disciples were still members of the Jewish church; they still conformed to its distinguishing rites and ceremonies; and still were in that situation which rendered it proper to adopt the leading features, and to express the leading sentiments, of its devotional services. Had Christ prescribed to his disciples at this time a form of prayer suited to the full manifestation of his religion, they could not have understood it; it would have shocked their prejudices, and might have occasioned their apostacy. He, therefore, with that wisdom which he uniformly displayed in similar circumstances, confined himself to such general ideas as they were able to bear, and compiled a form from those liturgies to which they were accustomed, and the contents of which still cor-

responded with their existing views and condition. But surely it is very unreasonable to think, that Christ would indiscriminately prescribe the same form of prayer to them and to us, though their situation and our's, with respect to religion, are so completely different. This would be to confound the different stages of our progress; and instead of the "strong meat which belongeth to them that are of full age," to administer the "milk that is fit only for babes."

4. But this will appear more clearly, when we remark, in the *fourth* place, that there is one of the petitions which it is impossible for us to employ in its original sense.—That petition is, "Thy kingdom come." By the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of heaven, we are to understand the dispensation of the Gospel, or the reign of the Messiah. This was the subject not only of earnest expectation, but also of continual prayer with the Jewish church; and their petition for it was in these words,

“ Let the kingdom of God come.” The petition, therefore, in the Lord’s Prayer, to which we are referring, and which was borrowed from their liturgies, presupposes that the dispensation of the Gospel has not commenced, and every one who uses it in its original meaning must proceed upon that idea. But, surely, it would be very absurd in us to use the petition with that understanding, seeing the kingdom of God is already come, and we are habitually blessing God that it is established amongst us. It would be absurd thus to ask God to give us that which we are, at the same time, thanking him for having actually sent to us. That is to say, we cannot, without an obvious contradiction to the existing fact, and to our own experience, put up this petition, “ thy kingdom come,” according to the precise import which it bears in the Lord’s Prayer. Nor let it be imagined, that when Christ prescribed this form of prayer, the kingdom of God had come. The kingdom of God, or of heaven, did not commence when Christ was born. It did not com-

mence till he had suffered, and was exalted, and had sent down the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, after he was born, his forerunner, John the Baptist, said to the people, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He himself, when he began to preach, held exactly the same language: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And, long after he began his public ministry, he sent forth his twelve disciples to "preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." There was, therefore, a literal propriety and correctness in the disciples praying, that the kingdom of God might come; but as this propriety arose from their living *before* the event, there can be no propriety in our praying in the same way, as we live *after* the event has taken place. It is true, we may use the petition with an interpretation of our own, and pray, that the kingdom of God may come more extensively. To this accommodation of the prayer to our circumstances there can be no valid objection; but then the necessity of such an accom-

modation is sufficient to demonstrate, that the use of the Lord's Prayer, as a strict form, is not obligatory upon us in any sense, or in any measure.

5. We have only to add farther, that the Lord's Prayer is not preferred in the name of Christ.—It is beyond controversy, that every petition we offer up to God must be offered up in that name, otherwise it cannot be acceptable and successful. That we may obtain what we need, we must ask it for the sake of him who is our great high-priest and intercessor with the Father. If we neglect this, we neglect what is essential to the efficacy of all our addresses to heaven. For of ourselves we are utterly unworthy to approach God, or to receive any blessing from him; and the whole scheme of the Gospel, as well as the express language of Scripture, shews, that it is only through the merits and intercession of the Redeemer that our supplications can be heard and answered. But the Lord's Prayer is not put up in the

name of Christ. That forms no part of it as recorded by the Evangelists. And surely we cannot suppose, that our Saviour would prescribe to us, as a set form, a prayer so radically defective as not to acknowledge the necessity of dependence upon his atonement and righteousness. A prayer destitute of this explicit acknowledgment might be suitable enough to the imperfect dispensation under which the immediate disciples of our Lord were placed previously to his exaltation; but it is not at all becoming the dispensation of the Gospel, which reveals Christ as the only medium of access to God, and the only meritorious cause of the benefits which God bestows upon us. And, therefore, we cannot reasonably suppose, that he would intend the form of prayer which he gave to his twelve disciples to be binding upon the practice of his church in all succeeding ages.

This idea is not imaginary : it is proved and illustrated by what our Saviour himself said to his disciples before his depar-

ture from the world. “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” * That is to say, that the disciples had as yet put up none of their petitions in the name of Christ : but that now, when he should be offered up in sacrifice, and ascend into heaven as the intercessor of his people, they should prefer *all* their petitions in his name, that they might obtain whatever their circumstances required.

* We do not mean to argue, that Christ was not acknowledged in the Old Testament worship. He has been the medium of acceptance from the very beginning. But, under the Jewish dispensation, reference was made to him by believers merely as the subject of divine promise ; and an explicit acknowledgment of his sacrifice and intercession, before that sacrifice was offered up, and before that intercession had commenced does not seem to have been either necessary or consistent with propriety. As soon, however, as Christ actually became an advocate with the Father, a clear and express dependance upon his advocacy, denoted by using his name, was indispensable on the part of all who would approach God with acceptance. And it is in this sense that the language of our Saviour to his disciples is to be understood.

This, by necessary consequence, excludes the use of the Lord's Prayer in its original state ; and therefore shews, that we are under no peremptory obligation, as some have maintained, to employ it in its original state, either in our public or in our private devotions.

Having succeeded, as we conceive, in establishing the position which we intimated at the outset, and in justifying ourselves for not admitting the Lord's Prayer as a precise and stinted form in our worship, it may perhaps be asked, if we mean to set it aside as useless, and to treat it with neglect. To this question, we answer, No. It is a portion of the Word of God, and on that account is entitled to our respectful attention. Nay more, we admit that, as a *prayer*, it may, in the way of accommodation, be employed with great propriety, and with great advantage. For instance, let the second petition be understood to pray for a more extensive propagation of the Gospel, and let the whole be offered up in the name of Christ ; and then it will

be excellently adapted to the use both of old and young. In this view it is not only recognised, but recommended, by our own church; and you will accordingly find a judicious exposition and paraphrase of it in our Larger and Shorter Catechisms. And that we may be enabled to enter more fully into its spirit, and more distinctly to comprehend its meaning and application, we shall afterwards endeavour to explain and illustrate the various particulars of which it is composed. In the mean time, we may take notice of the two lessons which it is intended to teach us with respect to prayer in general.

1. We are here taught to avoid the error of the Heathens, and, it may be added, of the Scribes and Pharisees, in drawing out our prayers to an unnecessary length.—Long prayers are not absolutely condemned by our Saviour, as if, in every case, and on all occasions, they were unbecoming and unlawful. An individual may sometimes be under the influence of

such devotional feelings, or placed in such peculiar circumstances, as to render a lengthened address to God, and a frequent repetition of the same sentiment, natural, proper, and useful. Thus Christ himself, on one occasion, from the more than ordinary fervour of his mind, offered up the same petition three several times, “saying the same words;” and on another occasion, from the singular nature of his outward condition, he remained “all night in prayer.” And, in truth, that trimmed and artificial system, which would prescribe to us, in our private intercourse with heaven, the same circle of ideas, and the same mode of expression, and the same consumption of time, is quite inconsistent with the nature of genuine piety, and must very soon have the effect of extinguishing it altogether in the breast. But then, on the other hand, let us avoid the extreme to which our Saviour alludes. The Scribes and Pharisees “made long prayers for a pretence.” This was evidently mere ostentation—base hypocrisy—a profanation of

what is sacred, for the purpose of promoting worldly views; and therefore a practice to be severely reprobated, and religiously shunned. The heathens, again, indulged in vain, useless repetitions, a vast multiplicity of words, from the belief and expectation that their gods would be affected and overcome by their wearisome importunity. This was gross superstition—indicating a complete ignorance of the divine perfections and character, and of the nature of acceptable worship, and consequently inconsistent with the advantages that are enjoyed, as to religious knowledge, under the revelation of the Gospel, or even under that of Judaism. Our “heavenly Father knows what things we have need of,” without the aid of any information from us; he has a willingness to bestow them upon us, which does not require to be stirred up by tedious and teasing expostulations; and he not only sees, but regards with approbation, the sincere desire of a devout and believing heart, though it be not clothed in words, and expressed in

accurate or eloquent language. It should therefore be our great object to have just apprehensions of the Being whom we worship, and to have our hearts impressed with sentiments of true devotion; and these, operating under the influence of this general rule, that as "God is in heaven and we on earth, our words should be few," will so guide us in the exercise of prayer, as to preserve us from the errors against which our Saviour warned his disciples.

2. We are taught by Christ, that our prayers should consist, in a great measure, of *petitions*.—We formerly stated, that in the liturgies employed by the Jewish teachers, the worshipper was taught to use little else than expressions of *adoration*. This was an error; and our Saviour, in the model of prayer which he prescribed, sets himself to correct it. He does not forbid us to feel that admiration, and reverence, and grateful affection, which a just view of the character and ways of God is fitted to awaken, and to express these feelings in de-

vout and appropriate terms. But he inculcates the necessity of regarding ourselves chiefly in the light of dependents upon his bounty and grace, and making this view of our condition run through all the exercises of devotion in which we engage. The neglect of this is just what we should have expected to find in the piety of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were remarkably proud, conceited of their own attainments, and unwilling to be indebted to the assistance of a higher power. But no such neglect is becoming in those, who having “denied themselves, and taken up their cross, are following Christ,” and in whose mind lowliness is a leading and fundamental virtue. The “Pharisee and the publican went up to the temple to pray.” The Pharisee saw nothing in himself but what was good and complete; and therefore he exclaimed, “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men.” But the poor publican was abased under a sense of his personal unworthiness, and felt his entire dependence on the mercy of heaven, and cried out with

most becoming humility, “ God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Yes, my friends, we are the *creatures* of God, who have not only received our existence from him, but must owe to him every thing that is necessary to its preservation, or can contribute to its comfort. We are the *guilty* creatures of God, and from him alone can we hope to obtain deliverance from the punishment we have deserved. We are the *corrupted* creatures of God, and it is only through the influences of the Spirit whom he sends, that our nature can be renewed and sanctified. And in whatever light we contemplate ourselves, the very first conviction produced in our minds, is, that we are the offspring and the pensioners of his goodness. We have no resources in our own exertions. Every thing that we need must come from him, both as it affects “ the life that now is, and that which is to come.” And as prayer is the appointed means for obtaining what we require, it is both our duty and our interest to cultivate, in an especial manner, the spirit of *supplication*—

to “make all our requests known unto God”—to ask of him “day by day our daily bread”—the “forgiveness of our debts”—deliverance from the bondage and pollution of an evil heart—and power to resist or to escape the temptations of a “world lying in wickedness.”

We have all along taken it for granted, that the necessity of prayer in general is speculatively acknowledged. But, I fear, we must not take it for granted that the acknowledgment is universally practical; that, in this case, we are all acting according to our belief; that, though we may differ as to the mode, we agree in actually praying to our Father in heaven. If there be any of you, my friends, who neglect this exercise habitually, or who neglect it altogether, be assured that notwithstanding your profession, you are not real Christians—you are not truly religious. It is true, that there are many who pray and yet live ungodly; but their hypocrisy will never justify you for the want of devotion. Why, you are expressly commanded to

pray ; and if you do not pray, you are living in defiance of the authority of God, and in the violation of his law. Prayer is the means which he has instituted for your spiritual improvement and eternal happiness ; if you do not employ the means, you cannot reasonably expect the end, or hope, on good grounds, to obtain salvation. Living in the neglect of prayer, you are, in fact, living without God, without Christ, and therefore without hope. Be persuaded, then, to live no longer in the neglect of that duty. “ Repent and be converted.” Resolve, and keep your resolution, that you will henceforth engage sincerely, regularly, and diligently, in an exercise so explicitly prescribed, so suitable to your relation to the Supreme Being, so essential to your progress in the Christian life, and so productive of heavenly comfort amidst all your difficulties, and trials, and distresses. Pray with fervour ; pray with frequency ; pray in faith ; pray with perseverance ; and God, who is the hearer and the answerer of prayer, will

accept of you, and bless you, and preserve you to his heavenly kingdom, where the voice of supplication shall be converted into the anthems of praise, and where, from your intercourse with Him whose communications often comforted you in this vale of tears, there shall result a "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory,"

LECTURE XXIV.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

WE have already endeavoured to prove, by a variety of arguments, that our Saviour never intended this prayer to be binding, as a set and stinted form, on the members of the Christian church; and, consequently, that though we neglect to use it in that view, we are not chargeable with any disrespect or any disobedience to his authority. It was prescribed, we observed, as a model or directory—and even in that respect went no farther, than to guard us against two prevalent errors. One of these errors consisted in “vain repetitions” and “much speaking,” to which practice the Heathens were greatly addicted, and

by means of which they expected to be heard. Christ taught his disciples to adopt a contrary mode—to be concise and comprehensive in their devotions—to pray as it became those who were convinced that their “Father knew what things they had need of before they asked him.”—The other error was found to a great extent among the Jewish masters, and consisted in their prescribing forms of prayer to their disciples, which were chiefly occupied with expressions of *adoration*, and had in them few or no *petitions*. Christ taught his disciples, not to omit adoration, but to abound more in petitions, as that part of prayer which was most suitable to their sinful, dependent, and needy condition. These are the two great lessons on this subject which our Saviour evidently designed to teach us by this form of prayer; and they are lessons bearing so directly on our character for piety, that we shall consult what is both becoming and useful, by carefully reducing them to practice.

But while we maintain that the use of the Lord's Prayer is not obligatory upon us, as an essential office either of public or of private worship, and indeed that some parts of it cannot with any propriety be employed in their original sense, yet there can be no objection to it in the way of accommodation : it may be made the substance and ground-work of prayer ; and in that shape it may be used with great advantage. With this view, we propose to give an exposition of the several particulars of which it is composed.

“ Our Father which art in heaven.” We are here directed to address God in prayer by the appellation of Father—an appellation the most appropriate and endearing. It expresses the nearest and kindest of all the relations in which he stands to us, and is well calculated to awaken in us the best affections of which our nature is susceptible. It represents him as the Being from whom we have received all the blessings we enjoy—on whom all our hopes of happiness depend—and towards whom it be-

comes us to cherish the sincerest esteem and the warmest gratitude.

He is our Father by *creation*. “Have we not all one Father?” says Malachi; “has not one God created us?” And, in calling us into existence, he has manifested his paternal goodness; for he has not only given us being, but made us capable of happiness; and not only has he made us capable of happiness, but of a happiness resulting from resemblance to himself in moral perfection, and a happiness which, thus exalted, is also progressive and everlasting.

He is our Father by *preservation*. He has watched over us from our earliest infancy: he has supplied our returning wants: he has protected us from the dangers that would otherwise have overwhelmed us: he has guided us amidst the difficulties that beset our path: he has comforted and upheld us under the afflictions with which we have been visited: he has regarded us with tender compassion, when we were so foolish and so wicked as to for-

sake him : and in all the chastisements, however severe, which he has sent to reclaim us, we may recognise the hand of a Father who pities, and forgives, and loves his children.

He is our Father by *redemption*. Though by our rebellion against his authority, and our unthankful returns for his goodness, we have forfeited every right to his favour, and exposed ourselves to his just displeasure, he has not cast us off, and left us to perish. He has sent the Lord Jesus Christ to assure us of his mercy, to make peace and reconciliation for our iniquities, to lead us back, by the path of penitence, to the embraces of parental love, and to the joys of filial affection. Through him, he pardons our criminal apostacy—restores us to our place in his family—bestows upon us the name, and the temper, and the privileges of redeemed children—invests us with a new title to their incorruptible, unfading inheritance—and so imparts to us “the spirit of adoption,” that, amidst all the changes and vicissitudes of our lot, we can look up

to him, and cry out with confidence, “Abba, Father.”

O what an inestimable privilege to be thus permitted to address God as Father—to approach him as children! Let us be grateful for it—let us think highly of it—let us walk worthy of it. Let us be encouraged to make frequent applications at a throne of prayer. Let us go to it with those feelings and dispositions which a sense of our filial relation is so well fitted to excite and cherish. Let us remember, that we are lifting up our souls to Him who is not merely able, but willing and ready, to grant us every thing that we need. And while we hope for a gracious acceptance of our persons, and a liberal answer to our petitions, let it be our determined purpose, that we will act, as well as pray, like “dear children,” and that, in a life of holiness, we will submit to the authority, and promote the glory, of our Father in heaven.

We are to pray to God as our Father *in heaven*. This does not mean, that we are

to consider him as limited to that particular place. He is everywhere present ; and our engaging in the duty of prayer at all, presupposes this very important and interesting truth. But he is represented as “ in heaven,” in order to solemnise, to sanctify, and to enliven our devotions. Heaven conveys the idea of greatness, power, majesty : and, addressing God as our Father clothed with these attributes, our gentler affections are mingled with reverential fear ; and, by the awe which they naturally create, we are prevented from indulging in unbecoming familiarity and presumptuous confidence.—Heaven is a place of unspotted holiness ; and, addressing God as our holy Father, we feel the necessity of approaching him with “ clean hands and pure hearts,” of banishing from our minds every thing that might offend him, of being humbled before him under a conviction of our unworthiness, and of applying for his pardoning mercy and purifying grace.—Heaven is the seat of perfect happiness ; and, addressing God as our Father sur-

rounded with that happiness, and ready to dispense it to all who are his “children by faith in Jesus Christ,” our hearts are more earnestly fixed on “those things which are above;” our piety, impassioned by this celestial contemplation, raises us above the ignoble pleasures of the world and of sin; and we supplicate, with more elevation of sentiment and more intensity of desire, for admission to his “presence, where there is fulness of joy, and to his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.”—When, therefore, we pray to God as our Father “in heaven,” let these ideas be distinctly before us. They are suggested by the phraseology of the address; and their effect upon our minds, while engaged in “making our requests known unto God,” must be both profitable and pleasing.

We are to pray to God as *our* Father in heaven. This teaches us to pray *with* others, and it teaches us to pray *for* them. It represents us as “having all one Father,” and as thus united to him, and to one another, by the closest ties. Hence arises a

very natural obligation to associate as members of the same family, and in “the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace,” to worship our common Parent—to express to him our common gratitude and dependance—to confess in his presence our common unworthiness—to lay before him our common wants—and to implore of him that supply of blessings, of which we all stand in absolute need. Hence, also, an obligation to the prayer of benevolence—to look upon all mankind as our brethren, when we are holding communion with “the God of the spirits of all flesh”—to feel a kind and affectionate concern in their best interests—and, loving them as we do ourselves, to make fervent intercessions in their behalf, that they may receive from the “one God and Father of all,” every thing that is essential to their present comfort and their eternal welfare. How graceful, and how improving, and how delightful, to engage in social prayer, under the impression, that to Him whom we address, and from whom we expect an answer, we stand in the re-

lation of children ! Let us never neglect the opportunity of engaging in such exercises, whether it be afforded us in our domestic circle, or in the courts of God's house : And, while occupied with them, let us think of our intimate connection with one another, as arising from our still closer connection with that gracious Being whom we unite in worshipping as our Creator, our Preserver, and our Redeemer.—How full of satisfaction to our own minds, and how beneficial in its effects, upon our principles, our affections, and our conduct, to comprehend, within the grasp of our devotion, all our fellow men throughout the world ! Let us cultivate this charitable spirit, when we pray to our Father in heaven, whether in public or in private—in our families or in our retirements. Let us pray not merely for ourselves, but for others—not merely for our acquaintance, but for the stranger and the foreigner—not merely for our friends, but even for our enemies—for the guilty, that they may be pardoned—for the sorrowful, that they may be comforted—for

the ignorant, that they may be instructed—for temporal and for spiritual blessings as they may be needed—for illumination, and improvement, and happiness to all mankind.

“Hallowed be thy name.” The name of God is to be understood here, as in many other passages of Scripture, to signify God himself—his character, his perfections, his works, his ordinances—everything by which he conveys to men a manifestation of his will, or a knowledge of his nature. And to “hallow” means to separate any thing from that which is common or impure, so that the thing which is thus separated shall be esteemed and treated as sacred or holy. The name of God is hallowed, therefore, when every erroneous or unbecoming idea of him is removed from our minds ; when we entertain worthy notions respecting his existence, his attributes, his government, his works, and his ways ; and when, in the convictions of the understanding, and in the sentiments of the heart—in the language of the mouth,

and in the actions of the life, there is paid to him that honour and glory which are most justly due.

There is much reason for our offering up this petition with earnestness. The object of it is of incalculable importance. Just and correct apprehensions of God lie at the foundation of all true religion, and of all pure morality. If we have mistaken views of his perfections and character, it is impossible that our worship should remain uncorrupted; and it is as impossible that our conduct should be kept free from error and degeneracy. Every thing that respects our faith, our piety, and our deportment, must, in this case, be in hazard of falling into the lowest state of degradation. The best and purest comforts we are capable of enjoying upon earth would be impaired or destroyed. And while the whole system of human life and happiness would be thus deeply and injuriously affected, God himself would be grossly dishonoured, and that too by creatures that were made to glorify and serve him.

While the object of the petition is thus of the greatest moment, it is an object of difficult attainment. “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” Our faculties are so limited—our knowledge is confined within such narrow bounds—our judgment is so liable to err, even when most vigorously exerted—our imagination is so impatient of controul—and we are so chained down, both by constitution and by habit, to the objects of sense, that to form and to retain just conceptions of such a Being, seems almost beyond our utmost reach. He is invisible, infinite, eternal; his “ways are not as our ways, and his thoughts are not as ours;” he “dwells in a light which no man can approach unto;” and while he fills the immensity of space with his presence, he inhabits every the minutest portion of the universe, in all his essence, in all his attributes, and in all his glory. To think of him, therefore, to believe in him, and to contemplate him *as he is*, requires the mightiest effort of which

our nature is capable, and an effort which neither our intellectual nor our moral powers can easily sustain. Even when we have succeeded in obtaining a correct speculative notion of the all-perfect God, how apt is it to be corrupted by the tendency, of which we are all conscious, to assimilate him to ourselves—to bring him more within the grasp of our faculties—and to invest him with qualities which we may not only more readily understand, but which may give countenance to those grovelling pursuits and enjoyments in which our fallen nature is so prone to indulge! Amidst all this liability to error, we unquestionably need that illumination and that assistance which can only come from “the Father of lights,” and should, therefore, frequently offer up to him the petition, that his name may be hallowed.

We are also strongly urged to the use of this petition, by surveying the actual fact, and perceiving how little, comparatively speaking, the name of God is truly hallowed. What numbers of our fellow crea-

tures have scarcely any thing more than a vague, irrational belief of his existence, as that of some superior power whom it is impossible to know, and for whom it is in vain to enquire ! What vast multitudes are in love with all the absurdities of polytheism and idolatry, giving to images, and imaginary beings, and departed mortals, to stocks and stones, that honour and homage which are due to God alone ! Nay, how many are there, even where the benefits of revelation are enjoyed, who, in this great, essential point, are the slaves of error and superstition ; and who both entertain in their minds, and exhibit in their lives, the most inconsistent, unworthy, and pernicious conceptions of the Supreme Being ! Influenced by such a melancholy fact—zealous for the glory of God, and for the improvement of mankind, let us fervently pray that his name may be hallowed—that everywhere he may be perfectly known, profoundly revered, purely worshipped, publicly honoured, and faithfully obeyed.

“Thy kingdom come.” We formerly observed, that the kingdom of God here means the Gospel dispensation, and that the disciples were taught to pray for it as that which was not yet revealed and established. Of course, we cannot employ the petition in the same sense in which they employed it, when this form of prayer was prescribed; but we may employ it in a larger and more comprehensive sense. They used it as strictly applicable to the circumstances of their times: we may use it with a liberal accommodation to the circumstances in which *we* are placed. They prayed, that the Messiah might *begin* his reign in the world: we may pray, that this reign may *continue*—that it may spread over the earth—that at length it may become universal. Such is the meaning that we must attach to the petition, “Thy kingdom come.”

And in this view, there is no petition that we can put up with more propriety, or that we should prefer with more frequency and fervour. What a great propor-

tion of mankind are still destitute of the light and blessings of revelation—ignorant of what it is most important for them to know—living in sin and in misery—without God and without hope in the world! The Gospel furnishes the only remedy for the moral evils under which they labour. It is a sufficient remedy; it is admirably adapted to their state, and is powerful to cure the very worst and most inveterate of their spiritual diseases. It is a divine remedy; for it has been appointed by God himself—his own Son has prepared it—his Holy Spirit applies it. It is a remedy intended for “the healing of the nations,” for all the children of men; they all need it as sinners, and its merciful purpose has intimated that it shall be offered to all. It is a remedy whose efficacy is not doubtful, but has been demonstrated by experience; millions have rejoiced in the deliverance which it has afforded them from the pangs of a guilty conscience, from the fears of divine wrath, from the power of inward corruption; in the spiritual health which it

has imparted to their souls; and in the hope of glory and immortality, with which it has supported them under the adversities of life and in the prospect of death. And can it be that any of us should not feel the most cordial anxiety that a blessing of such inestimable value should be universally enjoyed? Have we any true regard for the will and appointment of our heavenly Father? Have we any desire to promote the glory of him who has redeemed us by his blood, and reconciled us unto God? Have we any “compassion for the ignorant and for them that are out of the way”—for the Jews, who have rejected the Messiah—for the Mahometans, who have been deluded by an ambitious profligate impostor—for the poor heathens, who know nothing of the true God, and far less of Christ the Saviour—for the multitudes in Christendom who have “denied the faith, and are worse than infidels?” Have we experienced the power of the Gospel on our own hearts—enlightening our minds—sanctifying us by its truth—comforting us in our tribulations—lifting

us above the temptations of the world and the fear of death—and causing us to “rejoice with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory?”—If these things be so, then surely we will be constrained by a sense of duty, by motives of gratitude, by a regard to consistency, by feelings of benevolence and humanity, to wish for the more extensive propagation of the Christian faith. We will labour by all the means in our power to promote and accomplish that great end. And as one of these means we will pray that the kingdom of God may be more and more enlarged, till all “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Let us then, my friends, in addressing our Father in heaven, never forget this important and generous petition. Let us pray that every obstacle which opposes the progress of true religion may be immediately and effectually removed. Let us pray that it may be speedily sent to those dark regions which it has never yet been permitted

to visit, and that it may be better understood, more firmly believed, and more conscientiously obeyed, where it is already known. Let us pray that the ministers of the word may be faithful in declaring it, careful to preserve its purity, and eager to proclaim the message of salvation which it contains. Let us pray that the hearts of all Christians may be more zealous, more united, more liberal, in advancing the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. Let us pray that the opposition which it has to encounter from its avowed enemies and its false professors, may be borne down by the force of conviction, or melted away by the flame of philanthropy. Let us pray that the bad passions of individuals and the convulsions that disturb the world may be overruled by an Almighty Providence, for giving it a wider range and a more permanent influence. Let us pray, that the happy period may be hastened, when "all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God;" and when "all nations shall call the Saviour blessed."

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” This petition may be considered as subsidiary to the preceding one. It refers to the practical efficacy and consequences of the Gospel. In the former, we pray that the Gospel may be propagated: In the latter, that wherever it is made known and received, it may renew the heart, and sanctify the life, and lead its votaries to abound in those “fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.”

Unless this effect be produced, the Gospel is of no avail. If it does not make men obedient to the divine law, it can do them no good; for “faith without works is dead.” If it does not redeem them from sin, it redeems them from nothing; for sin is the source and the substance of all the evils to which they are subject. To live in rebellion against God must, in any circumstances, be hateful to him, and ruinous to his creatures. But to live in that state notwithstanding the advantages derived from the revelation of his will and mercy by Je-

sus Christ—to resist all the arguments and motives which it presents to a holy conduct—to profess attachment to it, or to enjoy its direction, and yet to persevere in that ungodly course from which it is intended to dissuade and to deliver us,—is a degree of aggravated guilt which cannot fail to bring down upon those to whom it attaches the accumulated wrath of heaven, and to do material injury to the general interests of religion in the world.

Even as to the prosperity and comfort of mankind in a present life, it is of essential consequence that they be distinguished by piety and virtue. What a different aspect would the condition of individuals, of families, of churches, and of society at large present to us, if a devout regard were every where paid to the will of God! It would be a heaven upon earth. The eye of the philanthropist would be delighted. There would be peace and joy in every land. And we would almost be tempted and almost warranted to say, “This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell: for I have desired

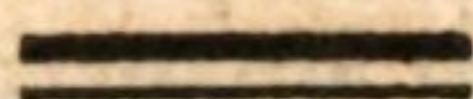
it." It is sin—opposition to the will of God—that produces those scenes of desolation and misery which disfigure the theatre of human life, and fill the heart of humanity with sadness and mourning.

But how is the cause of sorrow increased, when we think of sin in relation to the everlasting destinies of the sinner! How melancholy to see the creatures that were made to serve and glorify God, lifting up against him the weapons of unrighteous rebellion;—enjoying the advantages of revelation, and yet holding fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness;—born and called to immortality, and yet throwing away the precious hope for pleasures that offend the Almighty, degrade the soul, and terminate in the “second death!” Surely, my friends, we are bound by every good principle, and constrained by every compassionate feeling, to intercede with our Father in heaven, for the reformation, the moral improvement, the gradual perfection of the human race—to pray that the “will of God may be done on earth, as it is done

in heaven." The angels are represented as standing continually before the face of God; let us pray that men may thus, under a deep sense of their allegiance and obligations, be always ready to receive the divine commands. The angels "hearken to the voice of his word;" let us pray that men may listen to his mandates with the profoundest attention, and reverence, and submission. The angels "obey his commandments;" let us pray that men may not be contented with knowing his will, but be also determined and enabled to do it. The angels are described as having wings and flying swiftly; let us pray that men may feel all that zeal, and display all that diligence and activity, with which it becomes them to serve their God and Father in heaven. And while we pray for these things, let us realise them in our own practice. Let it be our care to yield a cheerful and unreserved submission to the divine precepts. Let us "prove" in every part of our conduct "what is the good, and holy, and perfect will of God." Let us

depend upon his grace to help us, and ask it of him in prayer. And let us be animated in the discharge of duty by the anticipation of that state of happiness and glory which God has promised to them that obey him, and for the enjoyment of which the cultivation of holiness is intended to prepare us.

LECTURE XXV.



THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

IN the preface to this prayer, we are taught to address God by the appropriate and endearing appellation of *Father*—that we may approach him as dear children, and ask of him with confidence according to our need :—We are taught to address him as *our Father*—that we may bear in mind our common dependance upon his bounty, and our obligation to social and intercessory devotion :—And we are taught to address him as our Father *in heaven*—that we may cherish that reverential fear, that holiness of affection, and that elevation of mind, which are naturally awakened, when we contemplate him as inhabiting a place

of exalted power, of unspotted purity, and unmingled happiness.

In the first petition, “Hallowed be thy name,” we pray that every erroneous idea of God may be removed from the minds of men; that worthy and becoming notions may be everywhere entertained respecting his existence, his attributes, and his government; that in the convictions of the understanding, and in the sentiments of the heart—in the language of the mouth, and in the actions of the life, there may be universally paid to him that honour and glory which are most justly due.

The second petition, “Thy kingdom come,” literally prays for the commencement of the Messiah’s reign, and consequently cannot, in its literal sense, be properly employed by us: But, when used in the way of accommodation, it will signify our earnest desire and prayer, that the limits of the Messiah’s reign may be extended; that the Gospel may be made known to those who are still unacquainted with it; that every obstruction to its progress

may be speedily and effectually removed ; and that the period may soon arrive, when “ all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God,” and when “ all nations shall call the Saviour blessed.”

When we use the third petition, “ Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,” we are understood to pray, that the Gospel may be efficacious as to its practical influence ; that it may not prevail merely as a system of doctrine, or a subject of speculation ; that wherever it is made known and received, it may renew the heart, and sanctify the life, and lead its votaries to abound in those fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God ; that men may be constrained to obey the divine will upon earth, with all that readiness, and submission, and activity, which characterise the obedience of the angels in heaven.

We proceed now to consider the *fourth* petition,—“ Give us this day our daily bread.”

1. This teaches us, that it is lawful and

proper to pray for the good things of this life. Religion does not require that we should either neglect or despise them. They are essential to our subsistence—they are conducive to our comfort—they are necessary for enabling us to perform our various duties with diligence and effect. We are therefore to make use of the means that are requisite for obtaining them—and one of these means is prayer to God.

2. Again, it teaches us to exercise dependance upon God for temporal mercies. We are apt to imagine, that while spiritual gifts must all come from heaven, and must all, therefore, be asked before they can be expected, those of a temporal kind are entirely the fruit of our own exertions, and may be looked for without supplication. And this notion seems to be justified by the fact, that those who pray little, and those who never pray at all, are often more prosperous than the most pious of the followers of Christ. We admit the fact, but we deny the inference. Wicked, prayerless men, partake of the bounties of

Providence in common with men that are good and devout, that they may have opportunity of repentance, and that they may be led to this repentance by the divine mercy and forbearance. Were they to be allowed to perish at once, because they do not piously ask what they need; or were they to be cut off whenever they transgressed,—the most gracious feature of the moral government of God would be blotted out, the dispensation of the Gospel would be annihilated, and all mankind would be destroyed beyond the hope of recovery. But while in this we see a reason for our heavenly Father “making his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and his rain to descend on the just and the unjust,” it does not at all alter the fact of our absolute dependance upon him, or relieve us from the petitionary obligation which that dependance implies. The means of our preservation flow just as directly and necessarily from him, as did the gift of life itself; and, consequently, it becomes us to exercise a continual trust in his good-

ness and power for the attainment of these, and of course to express that trust by asking them in prayer. Though we might receive them without the use of prayer, that must not hinder us from discharging our duty to God, who bestows them; and thus acknowledging him in all our wants, as well as in all our ways. And while we discharge a duty to God, by making them the subject of petition, we discharge also a duty to ourselves; for it is in this way only that we can expect to receive a Father's blessing with the bodily subsistence and temporal comforts that we crave, and that these will be made effectual for answering the spiritual and most important purposes for which they are given.

3. Again, this petition teaches us to be moderate in our desires after the good things of this life. We are not to pray for great wealth, nor extensive possessions, nor a superabundant or luxurious supply to our necessities. No; we are to pray for "daily bread"—for such mercies as may be requisite for supporting us in com-

fort and independence. This is evidently the spirit and letter of the petition. If God, indeed, is pleased to send us riches, we are to receive them with gratitude, and to devote them to his glory, and to every useful end. But we are not to set our heart upon them, as if they were at all essential to our welfare; and far less are we to allow such worldly-mindedness to mingle in our devotions. They are not to be the object of our ambition when we apply to God in prayer, any more than poverty itself. Each of these conditions of life has its disadvantages, with respect both to our temporal and spiritual state. The greatest safety, perhaps, is to be found in the middle. And the prayer of Agur may be considered as the expression, not more of piety than it is of good sense,—“Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord; or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

4. Again, this petition teaches us to

avoid all undue anxiety about our subsistence and comfort in after life. “Give us *this day* our daily bread.” We are not, indeed, to feel an absolute disregard to our future welfare and prosperity in the world. We are not to cherish any thing like presumptuous dependance on the providence of God. We are not to dismiss from our mind all concern about the morrow, and to confine our attention merely to the moment or the day that is passing over us. Scripture does not require this, nor do the circumstances in which we are placed admit of it. It is incumbent on us to be diligent and industrious even in providing “the meat that perisheth,” and to have a prospective view to the remaining time of our sojourning upon earth. But we are not to make it the business of our life, or an object to which any great proportion of our exertions shall be directed, that we may “lay up much goods in store for many years.” We are to “take no *thought*”—no teasing, distrustful thought, “for the morrow.” We are to avoid that excessive care-

fulness and anxiety concerning our future fortunes, which indicates either an improper attachment to the world, or a want of confidence in God ; which too often withdraws our attention from the duties of religion and morality ; and which frequently, if not always, destroys the very comfort that we are seeking to enjoy. We are to be provident, but not avaricious.

5. Once more, we are here taught to have our affections chiefly directed to spiritual blessings. This petition is not merely moderate and circumscribed in its aim—it is the only petition which the prayer contains for *temporal* mercies—all the rest are occupied in requesting *spiritual* mercies for ourselves and for others. The lesson is plain, and its propriety is obvious. The world is well enough in its own place ; but religion is the “ one thing needful,”—“ the good part which cannot be taken from us.” The health and comfort of the body must be cared for ; but only in subserviency to the health and comfort of our immortal souls. Though we have but a small portion of the meat which perisheth, it is of

little consequence, if we are allowed to partake of "the bread which came down from heaven," and which nourisheth to everlasting life. Let us seek and pray first for "the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" and being interested in these, "all other things will be added to us," in so far as they can contribute to our real and essential welfare.

The next petition is, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The term "debts" is here synonymous with sins or trespasses: for when we commit sin, we become indebted to the divine law, inasmuch as we are bound to pay the penalty, or suffer the punishment which it has denounced against transgressors. So that, when we pray God to forgive us our debts, we are to be understood as beseeching him to remit the obligations to punishment which we have contracted, to restore us again to the enjoyment of his favour, and to treat us as if we were his righteous and obedient people.

This is a petition which it becomes eve-

ry one of us to prefer with great frequency, and with great earnestness. There is not one of us who does not stand in immediate and urgent need of the blessing which it asks. We have all offended the Majesty of heaven. Our iniquities are numerous as the hairs of our head. They have been accompanied with many circumstances of aggravation. And of a debt so large, God might justly demand the payment from us, even to the uttermost farthing. Were this to be the case, how dreadful would be our situation! The displeasure of the Almighty against those who have trampled on his authority, who have despised his goodness and defied his power, implies in it all that is most horrible in feeling, and most frightful in anticipation. For though here they may escape his righteous judgments, yet the period is coming when vengeance will certainly overtake them—when, banished from the presence of Him who is the sole fountain of happiness, they shall be subjected to the pressure of hopeless, unmingled, and unspeakable misery.

We can conceive nothing more awful than the wrath of God, and nothing more desirable than the enjoyment of his favour. If, therefore, we have any serious regard to our own best and eternal interests, to be delivered from the former and restored to the latter will be the object of our most ardent ambition. And, blessed be his name, it is an object which we need not despair of attaining, if we seek it with sincerity of heart, and according to his appointed method. God is compassionate even to the chief of sinners. He has sent his son Jesus Christ to “give his life a ransom for many”—to “make peace by the blood of his cross”—to “bring in an everlasting righteousness” for the justification of all who believe in his name. And, seated on a throne of mercy, he is now declaring himself ready to be reconciled, and inviting us to return to him, that our souls may live. Encouraged by the gracious declarations of the Gospel—repenting of the ingratitude and rebellion of which we have been guilty—and trusting in the merits and

intercession of our great High Priest, who “has passed into the heavens,” let us “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy” to pardon us. Let us be earnest and persevering in our supplications for this blessing. Let us “give no sleep to our eyes, nor slumber to our eye-lids,” till we have asked forgiveness of the Lord, and have obtained it. Daily transgressing the commandments in their letter or in their spirit, let this petition be daily offered up to our heavenly Father. And let it always be done under the solemn impression, that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” and that they are truly “blessed, whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.”

“Forgive us our debts, *as we forgive our debtors.*” Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. By this we are taught the necessity of cherishing merciful and forgiving dispositions. If

we are destitute of such dispositions, we can have no reasonable hope that our prayers will receive an answer in peace: nay it is evident, from the terms of this petition, that if we use it while our hearts are influenced by a malicious or revengeful temper, we are actually praying that God would inflict upon us the punishment of our sins. If, on the other hand, we go to the throne of prayer with a mind so regulated by divine grace, that we are exercising forbearance and forgiveness even to those by whom we have been most deeply injured, we have assurance that the Father of mercies will listen to the voice of our supplications, and bestow upon us that pardon and kindness which we have extended to our fellow-creatures. “If ye forgive men,” adds Christ in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses, “if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” No lesson can be more plain and explicit: let us be careful to reduce it to practice.

Let us, in the habitual tenour of our life, as our Saviour has given us commandment, "love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us." And more especially, when we are beseeching the God and Father of the human race to pardon the numerous and aggravated transgressions we have committed against him, let there not be in our bosom one relentless feeling, one revengeful wish, against any of our fellow-men: But rather, laying aside "all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, with all malice, let us be kind one to another—tender hearted—forbearing and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has promised to forgive us." If, when laying our gift or offering of piety upon the altar, we "remember that we have ought against our brother; let us leave our gift before the altar, and go our way and be reconciled to our brother; and then let us come and offer our gift." Thus may we hope that our

gift, sanctified by a spirit of peace with all men, will be precious and acceptable in the sight of him who is "the God of peace" and love. Thus may we hope that our supplication will be heard and answered, for the sake of Christ. Thus may we hope that our Father in heaven will "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Strictly speaking, God does not tempt any man to sin. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." The petition, therefore, cannot be understood literally. But we are exposed to many temptations, over which he possesses unlimited controul, from the influence of which he is able to rescue us, and which it is our interest to escape or to overcome. And it becomes us to pray that he would preserve us from the dangers in which they naturally involve us. We have prayed that he

would pardon our past sins. And if we have been sincere in that request—if we have been made sensible what an evil and bitter thing it is to offend God, and have been truly anxious to be saved from the *punishment* of sin, we will be equally anxious to be saved from its *dominion*—to be prevented from continuing to do what provokes the displeasure of the Almighty—to be kept stedfast in the path of righteousness and of duty. It is the general object of the petition to accomplish that end, in so far as it is to be accomplished by prayer to God. And, indeed, prayer for that purpose is absolutely necessary. “Man’s ways are not in himself, and it is not in him that walketh to direct his steps.” As the mercy of God is requisite to pardon us, so his grace is requisite to help us. And it is at the same place—the throne of prayer, and in the same name—the name of Christ, that we are to obtain both the one and the other of these blessings.

The petition divides itself into two parts. In the *first* place, it prays that we may not

be led into temptation. Aware of our own weakness and corruption, and scrupulously afraid of any action which may be displeasing to God, we will be anxious to avoid those circumstances which might seduce us from our duty, and entice us into criminal indulgence. This is a primary and essential part of Christian wisdom, and of Christian holiness. And if it be wise to *act* in this manner, it is also wise to *pray* to this effect:—to pray that God would, in the course of his providence, so order our situation, that we be as little conversant as possible with those persons, and objects, and pursuits, by which we may be in imminent hazard of being allured to the commission of sin.

But in such situations we shall occasionally find ourselves; temptations will at times assail us, that are both numerous and powerful. If we are under the direction of good principle, we will then resist their influence with all our might. But knowing our own personal insufficiency, and assured that God will “make his grace sufficient for

us, and perfect his strength in our weakness"—we pray, in the *second* place, that he would deliver us from the *evil* of the temptation—that he would not permit us to be overwhelmed or injured by it—that he would not "suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; but would with the temptation make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it." Let us never then forget to exercise this dependance upon divine aid, and to ask of our heavenly Father the assistance that we need; assistance suited to our general necessities, and to the exigencies of every particular case. Let us pray for that good Spirit, who will "sanctify us wholly in soul, and body, and spirit"—who will impart to us the wisdom that is profitable to direct—who will "strengthen us with all might in the inner man"—who is "able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of God." Let us pray that, under his blessed influences and heavenly guidance, we may be preserved from doing the abominable thing which God hates, however strongly we may be tempt-

ed to it by interest or by pleasure; that neither the Devil, nor the world, nor the flesh, may succeed in leading us astray; that we may be enabled to maintain the resolutions that we formed, and execute the vows that we made at a communion table; that we may be “stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;” and that we may be at length prepared for entering into those happy abodes on high, for which our faith, and our holiness, and our prayers are intended to fit us,—where no tempter shall solicit—where no sin shall be committed—where no sorrow shall be felt—where we shall rejoice for ever, before him who has “redeemed us from our guilt by his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God.”

This prayer concludes with an ascription of praise to God as the supreme and universal Lord, justifying as it were our petitionary addresses to him; and an “Amen,” or “so let it be”—expressing the assurance we feel when we draw near to him, as children to a father, that he will receive us gracious-

ly, and grant our requests. Let us never forget, my friends, that all *our* prayers must be offered up in the name of Christ—that it is only through his mediation that we can contemplate the dominion, and power, and glory of God, with sentiments of confidence and hope—that it is only for his sake we are admitted into the divine presence, or can receive any of the blessings that we ask. In all our approaches, therefore, to God, let us approach him by the “new and living way” which Jesus has opened up and consecrated by the blood of atonement. Let us plead with him for the mercies we require, by a believing reference to the meritorious work of the Redeemer. And let us derive all our expectations of being heard and answered from the conviction, that He who has commanded us to pray is at the right hand of God making intercession for us—and that our supplications, perfumed with the much incense of his merit, will ascend to the Almighty with acceptance, and procure for us all that is requisite to our comfort here and our hap-

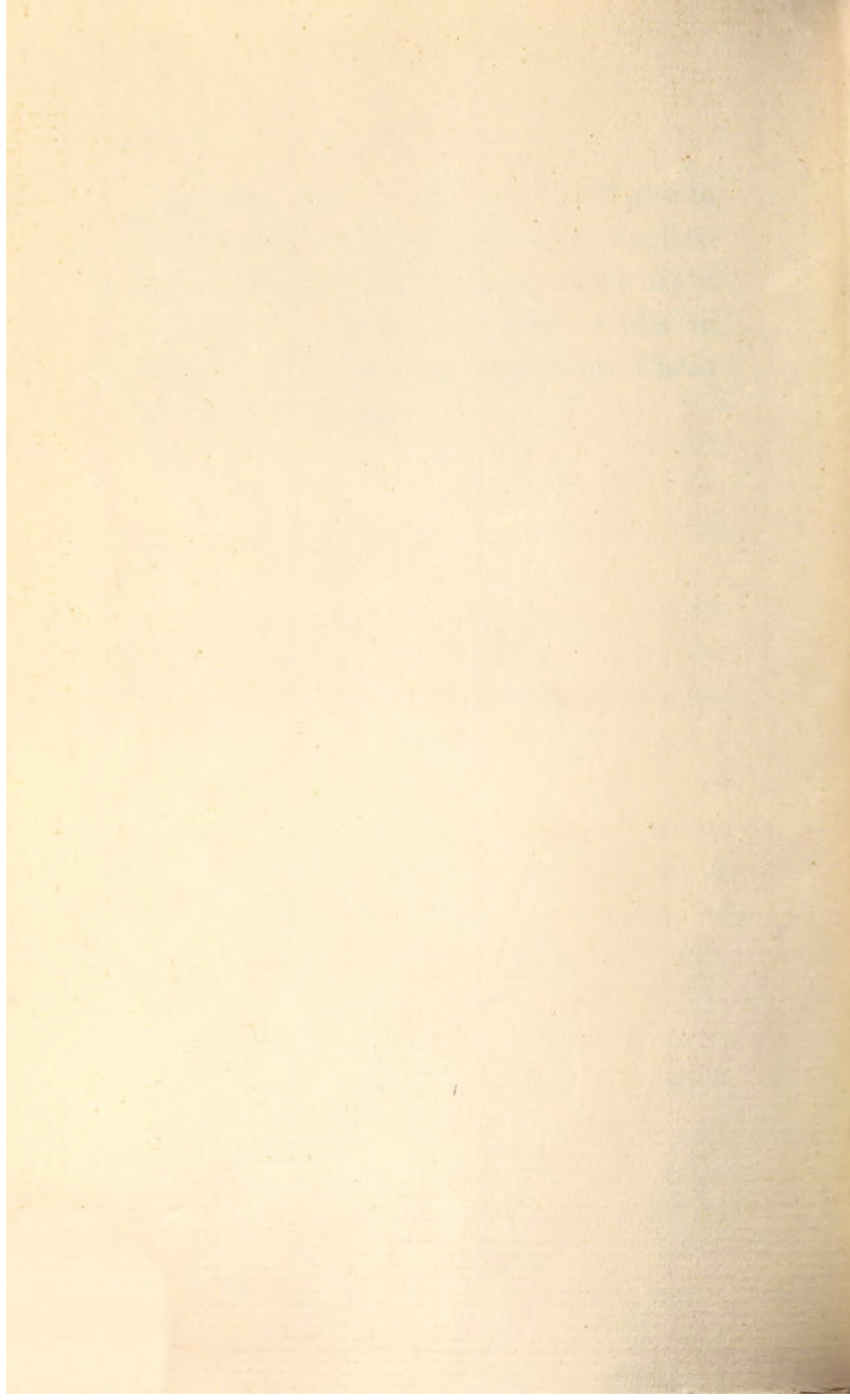
piness hereafter. May God himself give to all of us the spirit of prayer and supplication—may he teach us to pray as we ought to do—and may we be found of him in mercy and in peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord ! Amen.

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